The Ladder of Fortune

BY

FRANCES COURTENAY BAYLOR

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
OUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge

Entered at the Post Office at Boston as Second-Class Matter

Single Numbers, 50 cents
Annual Subscription (4 numbers), $2.00

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HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1900

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THE LADDER OF FORTUNE

CHAPTER I

In the year eighteen hundred and no matter when, some Sisters of Charity whose souls were as white as their bonnets went out to one of the Pacific States with the view of establishing various works of mercy (notably an orphanage), and being poor, solicited the aid of all whom they could interest in their charitable project. Two of them dropped as if from the clouds, one delicious spring day, upon an open stretch of prairie near the mining-camp of "Las Presas," where some horse-races were going on, and soon after joined a most heterogeneous assembly of Americans, Mexicans, Frenchmen, Germans, Englishmen, and the representatives of half a dozen nationalities beside, absorbed in the fierce excitement of winning or losing in an hour the hard-won gold for which they had been working with hammer and drill eight hours a day for years.

Incongruous as the addition was, it was not noticed for some time, and the Sisters stood quietly on the edge of the crowd waiting until the cheers and tremendous uproar of the moment should cease, their long black gowns held up so as to escape the dust, no visible reproach in the clear eyes that followed the movements of the surging, struggling,

fighting, swearing mob before them, an indefinable atmosphere of purity and peace enveloping them, such as one sometimes sees about a Quakeress. A Roman Legion could not have protected them better, nor half so well. Not that they had anything to fear, for in addition to that respect for their sex which seems to prevail in inverse ratio to the degree of civilization attained, and is consequently far greater among the cowboys of the plains than among the *flaneurs* of the Parisian boulevards, most of the men who were shouting, drinking, and betting in unrestrained license were Catholics, and no sooner caught sight of their dove-like visitors than they either sheepishly removed their sombreros and slunk off, or paid them the tribute of an uneasy silence.

The Sisters were still looking about them with that mixture of shyness and confidence, timidity and resolution, so noticeable in religious, when a miner accosted them with a "Well, ladies, what mought *you* want?" meant to be eminently polite and reassuring. On hearing their gently preferred request, he immediately constituted himself their escort and protector, and, having suggested that they should "Come up to the pool, and see the boys," proceeded to clear the way. His methods were more characteristic than ceremonious. Sometimes he pushed, sometimes elbowed vigorously the men before him. More than once he gave a brisk kick on the right shins, as was shown by the effect produced. The crowd yielded good naturedly enough to these direct appeals, for the most part, and either moved mechanically aside to let the advancing party pass,

keeping their backs turned to them and their gaze fixed on the race-course, or broke up into little disconcerted groups as they turned and saw the Sisters gliding meekly in the wake of their guide, with down-dropped eyes and hurried glances to the right or left at man, the monster. If the ladies felt it to be an embarrassing ordeal, the miners were to the full as confused, and were, in addition, thoroughly surprised by this flank movement on the part of the Church and the sex.

The press was so great as they neared the pool that every moment, in spite of the efforts of the gallant pioneer, it seemed as though they would be wedged in hard and fast. The Sisters made themselves as small and sinuous as possible. Their guide removed forcibly all the obstacles to further progress in turn, looked over his shoulder and said "Come on, ma'am," cried "Let me pass! Move thar — you!" lustily, but all the same the party brought up presently against a sturdy figure planted squarely in their path. "Git out of the way, will you?" shouted the nuns' champion. The man did not move. The champion seized him by the shoulders, drew back with a quick movement, and lunged forward, calling out imperiously, "Git out! Don't you see thar's *ladies?*" "*Ladies!*" he repeated, addressing all whom it might concern, but looking sternly at the man he had just released, who, so far from resenting the treatment he had received, looked thoroughly abashed, and felt justly rebuked. The effect of this speech and action was quite electrical. There was not a man there that nine women out of ten would

not have run away from in broad daylight, or would have been at all surprised to see after midnight under a bed, or beside it with a crape mask on his face, a knife in his hand, and murder in his glittering eye. Yet no sooner did the fact that "ladies" were there communicate itself to this assembly of ruffians than a thrill of chivalrous respect ran through it, and if it had been necessary, more knives would have flashed in their defense than Marie Antoinette found among the finest gentlemen of Europe, at least on the tenth of August, 1792, when, if ever, knightly swords should have "leaped from their scabbards." A path opened before the Sisters at once; their champion's occupation was gone.

Arrived at the pool, the elder of the two women again explained their mission to a little knot of men indicated as representative by a nod from their escort, addressing herself especially to a certain tall Virginian, who looked like a peripatetic arsenal, so heavily was he armed, — "the mildest mannered man that ever cut a throat," a deadly, gentle sort of giant, with a cool eye that had a "Ready! Aim! Fire!" kind of expression in its gray depths, and a soft Southern voice, low in tone, and full of queer, drawling inflections. The story took a little time in the telling, and was twice interrupted by two drunken miners who were brawling at a short distance. When the Sister's low voice became inaudible in consequence, the Virginian called out, "Stop that thar!" and there was a lull in the noise. But presently it broke out again louder than ever. The next moment one of the disputants saw a pistol

suddenly appear over his shoulder within an inch of his temple. The Sisters trembled in their shoes. "Shut up! D'ye hear? That ain't fit talk for ladies to hear. There's *ladies* here!" commanded the Virginian, and, finding himself obeyed, withdrew the peaceful inducement he had offered them to live a respectable, conservative life. When he had heard all that the Sisters had to say, he smiled amiably, so pleasantly, indeed, as to almost neutralize the effect produced on the conventual mind by what they had just seen, and, waving a long arm toward the spokeswoman with an air of authority, said: "We *sabe*. You are prospectin'. That's all right. Jest you two climb up in one er them empty wagons, yonder, whar you kin see the race that's coming off, and we'll attend to you presently. I've got five hundred staked on it, and if our crowd wins, we'll give you a send-off that'll make your old heart jump plum' out er your body."

The Sisters meekly obeyed, and were soon throned high above the crowd, which surged and swayed, and shouted and swore more than ever, as now this, now that horse gained the advantage. The Virginian and his "crowd" won, and when their horse passed the winning-post with a magnificent acceleration of his long, reaching gallop (tell it not at Rome!), the Sisters' cheeks were flushed, their eyes were bright with excitement, and the younger one's bonnet was pushed slightly askew in consequence of frequent confabulation with her associate. They, too, had enjoyed the race, a novel and unique experience to them, though they never would have owned it.

When the stakes were delivered, the Virginian was as good as his word. Sauntering lazily over to the wagon, he took up a position near the rear wheel, put one foot up on the hub, and shouted out to his comrades, in a voice so rarely raised and so clear that it gained all their attention, "Come up here, boys, and ante half your winnings for the orphans, and may the devil catch the man that refuses." No one refused, strange to say, and an amazed old Sister had the satisfaction of seeing eight hundred dollars thrown into her lap, as she sat there, smiling and nodding to each contributor in turn as he filed past, her face growing more and more radiant, the very flaps of her cap quivering sympathetically with such thrilling good fortune. The Virginian had kept up a running fire of jest and comment all the while, and his sallies seemed to be taken in good part, as the worst jokes are apt to be when they come from the best shot in a frontier camp.

As the last man approached, he was hailed with, "That 's right, Pete Withers, chuck in your pile. You are an orphan yourself!" It was not a remarkable bereavement to have been sustained by a man past fifty, and Mr. Withers accepted the condolence at its exact value. He made no reply, but, as he tossed in his clinking coins, grew facetious in his turn, and said to the Sister, "If ever you get a whack at one of my orphans in your line, ma'am, you teach him to go his last nickel on the winnin' horse." This speech was greeted with a shout of laughter and approval, and when it died away some one proposed "Three cheers for the old gal and the orphans!"

which were given with immense enthusiasm. The Virginian gallantly helped the Sisters out of the wagon, walked with them to the place where their modest vehicle stood, saw them into it, watched them drive off, and as he returned to camp, fell into a train of reflection with which we have nothing to do. It began with, "It was wuth the money to see a decent woman ag'in," and ended with, "If Mary had of lived" — and (I regret to say) what was known at Las Presas as "a big drunk."

In this way an admirable charity was established, and in time grew into a flourishing institution. Two years later Pete Withers was killed in a brawl with a Mexican, a fate that he must have been more or less prepared for, to judge from what afterwards happened.

There came a ring at the door of a certain convent one day, and the portress, pushing aside the sliding panel that gave her a view of all applicants for admission, saw a man standing there with a child in his arms, — a small man with a mild face, which in addition to a permanently careworn expression bore an especially puzzled, grave air, that seemed to spring from a consciousness of having come on an important mission. He was holding back from the door a sturdy boy, who was kicking away at the lower panels with a view to gaining admittance immediately. "Is — ?" began the man interrogatively, and then stopped short, uncertain how to proceed with his inquiry. He had spoken *of* the Sisters as "them Catholic women in black dresses, with white blinkers, that raises orphans," but instinc-

tively felt that he must give a less descriptive and more formal turn to his request to see one of them. He shifted the child he carried to the other arm and began again in a slow, embarrassed way, "Does them — can I — ?" The portress came to his assistance. "The Sisters of the Good Shepherd live here. Do you want anything?" she said, still eying him in a way that made him feel anything but comfortable.

"That 's it. I want to see one of them," said the man, much relieved, — "the boss lady," he added, as the door opened and he was admitted into a neatly paved courtyard, and then into the convent proper. "Ssh! ssh! Georgy. Don't push ahead!" he admonished the boy, whose costume consisted principally of an absurdly high pair of new top-boots that clopped noisily along the bare passages through which they were being led.

The quiet, the orderliness, the brilliant cleanliness of the place, struck awe into his miner's bosom, and it was not until he was left alone in a small parlor by the rapidly retreating portress that he ventured to speak above a whisper, seat himself on the edge of a cane chair, and place the baby girl on his knee. He had to wait some minutes before any one came, and spent them in collecting his ideas and in looking at the scanty furniture of the room: at the large crucifix opposite him, the pictures of the Madonna and saints, the showcase at the end of the room with its little feminine contributions of slippers, and pincushions, and dressed dolls, and what not. He did not examine them very particularly, and they were ordinary enough objects, really, such as are gener-

ally offered for sale in support of religious or charitable institutions, but they represented the highest degree of culture and the most miraculous accomplishments to his mind, and he was cautioning Georgy to "come away!" from them, when a slight rustle revealed to him that a Sister had entered the room. The visitor scrambled up from his chair, ducked his head awkwardly, and, without waiting to be invited to do so, sat down again and righted an astonished baby. The Sister, who had been standing quietly by, with as much of her white hands as were left visible by her long sleeves folded tranquilly in front of her, now smiled pleasantly and took a chair.

The stranger's explanation began with, "My name 's Hodges, — Bigfoot Hodges;" and his story was a somewhat long one, more full than explicit, indeed, but the Sister listened patiently and pleasantly, and soon put him at ease. "Pete Withers and me was friends from the offstart, as thick as thieves always, and never had no quarrel from first to last," was the second statement made; "and these here is his two, — George Washington and the baby," was the third. It took a half hour to do it, but it eventually appeared that Mr. Hodges had come there as envoy extraordinary, empowered to treat with any and all institutions; that his friend was dead, that he "was n't fixed right nor fitten to raise no children," and that he desired to shift a burdensome responsibility to shoulders better fitted by nature and grace to bear it. This was a serious proposition. The Sister asked a good many questions. Where was the

mother? Were they to be brought up Protestants? Would the order be given absolute control over them? Were there no relatives who would take them or claim them? On getting satisfactory replies, the Sister retired to consult other Sisters. There was another interval of waiting for Mr. Hodges, during which mysterious bells tinkled occasionally through a silence of deep repose, and black-robed figures flitted through the hall.

George Washington was getting perfectly unmanageable, the baby fretful, and Mr. Hodges disheartened by all this unforeseen difficulty and delay, when the Sister returned with her Superior. More conversation followed, more questions about the health, intelligence, and looks of the children, their past and their future, and then all was happily settled, and they were formally committed to the tender mercies and loving-kindness of good women. Mr. Hodges by this time had grown first at ease, and then confidential, and began to give a biographical sketch of his late friend, with a history of their relations, and much praise of "Pete."

"*He* war n't the man to die in his bed like a woman or a preacher," said he, in a tone of great pride and affectionate admiration. "He always said he 'd go with his boots on, and he 's done done it. He 's kep' his word, and always did. If *he* said he was going to kill a man, he killed him. And it 's by his orders that those children are brought here. Sez he to me, sez he, 'Bigfoot, I ain't no Catholic, like these damned greasers, but somehow them women always puts me in mind of my good old Methodist

mother back yonder in Missourah, a-settin' by the fire singin' "When I can read my title clear." And if I should get knocked on the head, there 'll be nobody to look after the children, and you jes' take 'em right there where they 'll be raised to be a heap better than you and me, I hope, — raised correct!' "

With this the faithful ambassador got out a greasy leather bag tolerably well filled, and dumped it down on the table in front of him, saying, "He never lef' nothin', Pete did n't, and that 's all I 've got. I 've had the devil's own luck lately. Play on that while it lasts, ma'am;" and having been shown over the building, the dormitories, lavatories, refectory, and chapel, he took his departure well pleased with the success of his mission, but disposed on the whole to be thankful that he was not an orphan in a convent.

The children did not miss him, and were at once absorbed into a system capable of receiving and digesting any number of waifs and strays, as elastic in some directions as it was rigidly inflexible in others, and strong at every point as the interlaced rings of chain armor. The practical arts of life were better understood and better applied at the convent, religious house as it was, than they often are in the world, so that a domestic paradise of perennial peace, comfort, and harmony was created, from which Adam and his apples were carefully excluded, while the spirit in which everything was done gave a beautiful outlook to the life, and a dignity and stability, such as the most cleverly conceived and competently administered schemes having

only personal and selfish ends in view must lack. There was a soul even to the convent garden, which commanded a noble stretch of sea, the sky, the distant Sierras; though some people only saw its body as represented by its orderly rows of vegetables and excellent fruits.

Had the children been transported to another planet, they could not have been further removed from everything they had ever known; but even the eldest, the little namesake of the *pater patriæ*, had no conception of the radical nature of the change, and only knew that he was in pleasant quarters, among people who had sound views about the proper way to cut bread, — which was, he thought, thick, — and generous views about the quantity of butter and brown sugar spread on it. He did not like the fundamental law of the house, which was obedience to authority, and showed great spirit and ingenuity in evading or defying it at first; but he soon found that he might as well try to alter the law of gravitation, although he did not formulate scientifically the gentle, irresistible pressure that put him in his place and kept him there. After that, he fell into the ranks with his fellow orphans and gave less trouble. As for the baby girl, his sister, she made a home for herself in every woman's heart about her before she had been in the convent a week. If she had been a Vere de Vere, she could not have been a lovelier example of that refined delicacy of feature, form, and complexion that is generally summed up in the term "aristocratic," and if she had been a queen, she could not have made more imperious demands upon the time, obe-

dience, and sympathy of her attendants. In her own pretty, winning fashion she subjugated them all, and became the delight of the house. The ladies were only too glad to be her *dames d'honneur*, and it soon became a privilege to do anything for "our dear child," as they called her. Instead of one mother or nurse she had twenty, and she was as important a member of this, a religious house, as she could have been of any secular one. Her food and bath, her clothes, her health, her amusements, were matters of as serious interest, her lisping utterances were hailed with as much delight, and repeated as proudly, her favors as eagerly coveted, her tears as lovingly dried, her wants more carefully ministered to. The sweet curves of her baby face, her fair curls, and long eyelashes were the themes of admiring comment constantly; her goodness and intelligence were articles of a new creed that she had brought with her, and tears filled more than one Sister's eyes when those soft little arms were clasped about her neck.

The deepest and shallowest alike among them found enjoyment in the society of a creature so helpless and engaging, so innocent and pretty. It was much more amusing to dress her than any doll, and they put her into raiment of exquisite needlework, white and blue. They called her Mary, dedicated her to the blessed Virgin, made a great ceremony of her baptism. The Superior, a soft-hearted German, called her tritely but truly enough "the angel of the house," and liked nothing better than to wheel her carriage across the flagged courtyard

by the hour. The empty corridors were now full of strange noises: the "patter," "patter," "patter," of the little blue shoes; sweet, sudden bursts of clearest laughter; little shouts that the severest Sister could hardly find words to mildly repress. It was a pretty sight to see now one Sister, now another, holding out much bedraped arms to the little one, with looks of wooing love, and to see especially the one whose duty and joy it was to put the child to bed, sitting in her low chair crooning to the motherless babe, the white cap bent fondly down over her charge. It was the dewdrop cradled in the heart of the lily instead of the rose.

They had quite settled that the little Mary was to live with them always. It was a great satisfaction to them to reflect that both parents were dead, that there was nothing to fear from the interference of relatives, to feel that she was all their own. It was taken for granted that she was to be a religious when she grew up, and considered a sign of election and grace that she crowed with delight the first time that she was taken into chapel and caught sight of the flowers on the altar. "A dove in the temple," said the Superior. But like these fair, sweet blossoms, she was not to be long there. It was a terrible blow to the Sisters when the child suddenly sickened and died, and now, indeed, the silence of the convent was one that could be heard. Purer tears never fell from mortal eyes than dropped on that little body, nor did a short grave ever cast longer shadows. The community rule was broken to an extent that permitted her to be laid in the

nuns' cemetery, and many were the pilgrimages made to that spot.

Mr. Hodges was taken there when he came to see the children the following year, and, having reached it, he stared thoughtfully for a long while at the white cross with its appropriate inscription, "But the dove found no resting-place for the sole of its foot, and it returned into the ark." At last, with a pitying tone that contrasted oddly enough with the incongruous speech, he drawled out meditatively in his slow, low voice, "She was euchred early in the game, now, war n't she?" There was another silence, and then he added: "Well, I reckon it 's better as it is. There is no discount on her sort where she has gone, and it would have been rough-like on the little innercent living along without no home and relations; not but what you 'd er been good to her always, and me willin' to do what I could. She was a cunnin', lovin' little scrap." Nothing more was said. The Sister who was acting as his guide stooped and trained a stray creeper around the base of the cross, repressed a rebellious thought, and some tears that would well into her eyes, and they walked silently back to the neat, bare reception room they had left. George Withers (whose name was somehow never corrupted into "Georgy," child as he was) went in to see him there, and talked to him for some time, and was sent away again, leaving Mr. Hodges well pleased with the improvement visible in his dead friend's son.

"That boy uv Pete's has got 'bout as good a head as ever I see on a boy, — sensible and judg-

matic, I should say, and keen fur a trade. He 's right-down good-lookin', too, now he 's smartened up. But ain't he kinder close? I kain't get nothin' out uv him no way," he remarked to the Sister; and then having produced a small sum of money, for which he apologized on the score of being "pretty near busted," he began to think of leaving. He got as far as the door, and stood there rolling and unrolling the brim of his felt hat while he fell into fresh reminiscences of his unforgotten friend. "Yes, he was the best friend I ever had or ever will have," he said. "Ef I 'd er called him up in the middle uv the night, he 'd have gone anywhurs and have shot anybody I p'inted out, from a governor to a greaser. Yes, he would. Pete was that sort. Did you ever see him? Strappin' big fellow. That man could have knocked me down and cleaned me out any day in the week he 'd er wanted to. But he never did, — not onst." This seemed a remarkable basis for any friendship, especially a masculine one, and the gentle Sister hardly knew how to express herself in regard to it, being distracted by a feeling that it was her duty to at least intimate that murder was murder, while these details were being given with fond pride. But while she was choosing words in which to convey this truth least offensively, Mr. Hodges's body lurched forward suddenly, and he gave a backward scrape with his right foot, saying, "Well, good-by. Do the best you kin fur Pete's boy," and he shuffled out into the hall. She followed him, smiling, and unbolted the front door, a friendly office which he acknowledged

by another lurch and scrape, and a final, "Well, take care of yourself!" Nor did that door ever open to admit Mr. Hodges again.

Nothing more was ever heard of him at the convent, except a rumor brought by some chance from Las Presas to the effect that "Bigfoot Hodges had gone to the States."

This left the little George Washington stranded high and dry on the world's beach, without a protector, but not without friends. The good Sisters clothed and fed and taught him, brought him through various illnesses triumphantly, were always kind to him, and tried conscientiously to love him. But beyond the kindness which the benevolent feel for the objects of their benevolence, they found it hard to go. There was something in the boy's self-reliant and cold manner that repelled affection, a reserve and hardness such as one sometimes sees in children bred under harsh conditions. He obeyed the rules of the institution, he learned what they could teach him, he was apparently content. He took very little part in the plays and amusements of the other boys, and was rarely implicated in their escapades. He showed great fortitude, and bore pain like a small Spartan. His energy was boundless when allowed to vent itself in certain channels; his obstinacy incredible in refusing to have it diverted into others. Even the confessor to the convent was worsted in an attempt to conquer a will that was inflexible in quality, but not imperious in expression. "I don't understand that child," he said, in talking over the affair with the Superior, nor

would he accept the explanation offered by a Spanish Sister who had been worsted in a great many conflicts with "*Jorge*," as she called him, and who, religious as she was, pronounced him a *diavolito*.

"He is so silent, so grave. He is not like a child. You might as well try to break or bend that iron bar," said the Superior. "I love all my children, but I, too, do not understand that one. Look at little Robbie, so merry and generous and loving! And there is Frank, very willful and always in mischief, but so sorry for it afterwards, so eager to get my forgiveness, and so affectionate, running up to me constantly to embrace me, and feeling evidently quite rebuffed when I give him my hand to kiss instead. But George! I can't remember that George has ever offered a caress, and if I kiss him, he seems merely to submit to it. His is a peculiar character, and I often pray to Our Lady to show me how to deal with it. The responsibility is great, very great."

There were a good many of these conferences between Father Pelissier and the authorities of the convent, but they had no result so far as any effect upon George was concerned. When he was a gangling lad of twelve, tall for his age, and very ungainly, it was set before him that the greatest of all honors, the honor of becoming a priest, was intended for him, an honor that he promptly and most positively declined. Appeals, arguments, remonstrance, and rebuke were tried, but quite in vain. The only result of this was that a seed of discontent was implanted in him, which not only took deep root, but soon bore fruit. One or two little things happened

shortly afterwards that angered him. Finally, when walking in decorous procession one evening, under the marshalship of two of the nuns, he heard himself jeered at by a little knot of gamins as "Sissy."

That night, without so much as one regretful thought of anybody, or one doubt born of love and gratitude, he ran away from the convent, and fearlessly undertook to open the oyster-shell of life with his own little knife. Great was the consternation of the Sisters when this became known, and it was a proof of their goodness that they were disposed to blame themselves rather than him. "He must have been very unhappy for a long while. I am afraid we have mismanaged him," said the troubled Superior. "Gone! Gone out into the world without a friend or a cent! Oh, the poor, poor child! What will become of him? Send at once for Father Pelissier." The Father came, there were consultations, letters were written, search was made, advertisements inserted in several papers. But it was many a long day before they got news of that orphan.

The Superior was mistaken, though, in supposing that George Withers was penniless. This thrifty youth had saved, and scraped, and invested, and doubled the little sums given him from time to time by Father Pelissier. He had dickered and chaffered so successfully with the other boys by exchanging everything that he could lay hands on, and by the sale of slate pencils, candy, and the like, that he had put most of their pennies, as well, into what he considered the right pocket. And he had added to this quite a tidy little sum made by selling certain stale

vegetables, that he got from Matthew, the gardener, to a poor family living very near the convent. So that when he finally weighed anchor, and left the quiet haven in which his little cockle-boat had been so long and so safely moored, he actually had ten large silver dollars in his purse. He was not the boy to start out to make his fortune *à la* Whittington. Had he been possessed of a cat, he would have promptly exchanged that cat for a dog, and that dog for a goat, and that goat for a calf, and that calf for a colt, and that colt for a cow, and so on until he got an elephant to ride off on, supposing him to have had an elephant in his mind's eye when he began to trade.

Had the Superior known how matters really stood, and how eminently fitted the lad was to blast a way, if necessary, for himself through the world, she would have been spared many an unhappy thought, and a haunting image of "poor George" perishing miserably in a great variety of ways. If he had been a cat, he could not have dropped more easily on his feet. He made his way to "'Frisco" with the money he had. Before he had been there three hours he got a place as errand boy in a store. In a week he was washing bottles in a beer saloon, at an advance on the first wages. In a year he had set up a little news-stand on the corner of a street. In two he had laid by a small sum of money, with which he drifted to a town of about five thousand inhabitants, called Eureka, a place that had sprung up like the villages that Potemkin summoned into existence with a dash of his pen, to please his impe-

rial mistress, only that the genie in this instance was a New York speculator, the enchanter a miner, and his wand a pickaxe.

For the next fifteen years George Withers was, in versatile American fashion, everything by turns and nothing long, and as if the fickle goddess was determined to test the strength and depth of his devotion to her, he was not particularly successful at anything during this period. He was in turn a teamster, a blacksmith, a clerk, a barkeeper, a miner, in which latter capacity he made his first *coup*, and sold a claim for thirty thousand dollars that he had bought from a disgusted fellow-laborer for three hundred. It was entirely characteristic of him that such an idea as sharing this extraordinary profit with the former owner of the property never once occurred to him, although he knew him to be not only poor, but in great straits for money. If such a thought had come to him, he would have hustled it out of his mind as a form of criminal folly too monstrous to be entertained for one moment, much less indulged. People spoke of him as a cool, sensible, "long-headed" fellow, and in his silent, secret way he admired himself in that character extremely. He had no ear for the dumb appeal of "the still, small voice," but the popular judgment penetrated his inmost consciousness. It gave an immediate impulsive force to certain feelings and ambitions already there, precisely those that ought to have been repressed, not stimulated, unfortunately. Roughly formulated, these were a strong desire to be a power, a controlling force, to get on in life at any cost to

himself or others (though of others he thought only so far as they could contribute to the end in view), and a determination to concentrate all the energies of a resolute soul on making a great fortune.

At first he thought that the measure of his ambition would be filled if he could become "the richest man in the State," and he set himself to fulfill this noble ideal with intense earnestness, and a disciplined fervor that, rightly directed, would have made a hero or a martyr of him. It was not long before he ceased to be called "enterprising" and "pushative," as scarcely embodying the respectful admiration with which his career was watched. While he was still a slim young fellow, with no avoirdupois claims to the distinction, paragraphs began to appear in the local papers in which he was spoken of as "one of our most solid citizens," and in which he was lauded as "a sterling business man of acute mentality," a phrase that flattered him almost as much as it did its inventor, and for the same reason, — namely, because neither of them had any very clear idea of what it meant, but delighted in its opulent vagueness, and were convinced that it somehow expressed their individual superiority to ordinary merchants and reporters.

Eureka was already sufficiently crystallized and conservative, small as it was, to set a very high value upon solid and sterling citizens; and as in most other American communities, the kingdom of earth, if not that of heaven, was made up of more or less successful business men, who were respected in proportion to their capacity for intense, unresting, un-

varied application to the business of money-getting, and their fanatical absorption in it. It was regarded as highly meritorious and praiseworthy to devote every moment of time that could possibly be given to it, to bring every ray of daylight to bear upon it, and to consecrate to it the whole man. Everything that was not business was inherently trivial and unimportant, except when seen in clergymen, whose business it was to be religious, or in lawyers or doctors, whose business it was to know more than their neighbors. Accomplishments were pardoned in women, — when found thus properly combined with notorious feebleness and irresponsibility, were even found pleasing by some more advanced minds.

But no very serious demands were made upon these tolerant souls, even by those chartered representatives of untold culture, the young ladies of Eureka. The absence of anything like good servants in the community limited the range and display of whatever natural gifts they possessed and artificial graces they had acquired to what has been called "the kitchen range," which was not as unfortunate as it sounds, when one reflects that good bread is on the whole far more satisfactory to most people than good music; still less so, when it is stated that music was represented in the Eureka gamut by a melancholy octave, in which the lowest note stood for "Yankee Doodle" (executed with one finger by Miss Susan Briggs, daughter of Andrew Briggs, grocer), and the highest for "The Maiden's Prayer," as played by Miss Jenny Pierce, daughter to Judge Pierce, while literature was supposed to have embodied

itself in Mrs. McStea, who "taught school," and subscribed to a fashion magazine regularly.

In such a community "G. W. Withers," as "Pete's boy" now signed himself, was a man who speedily made his mark. By this time he had developed into a broker and banker in a small way. He slept over his office and lived in it. He took his meals intermittently, promiscuously, gulpingly. He entertained no one, and declined the few invitations that were extended to him, — infrequent temptations to join this or that pleasure party, Eurekans not being given to junketing, and regarding social gatherings as things to be conceded as rarely as possible to the very young and the hopelessly frivolous.

It soon became known that young Withers went nowhere, not even to funerals, though nearly every one felt that even a business man might, could, and should go to "buryin's," and where he certainly would have escaped the charges of frivolity and waste of time which would have been brought against a less popular form of entertainment. Everybody went to "buryin's" in Eureka, and it was thought a striking proof of devotion to a high ideal, and of commercial invulnerability to temptation, that Mr. Withers resisted even this seductive appeal to his lighter instincts, on the ground that he "could n't leave the office." Fathers with thoughtless sons of careless or convivial habits pointed him out as "a man that never takes a holiday," and admired him for saying that he "could n't afford trips" (when it was well known that he could have gone around

the world at a moment's notice, if he had cared to travel), and drew sarcastic parallels between the position, habits, and prospects of the magnate who would not indulge in an outing, and the graceless youth who was always ready for one.

Young Fred Mastin was so often lectured about his sinful idleness, with George Withers for text and familiar illustration, that he got to quite hate that model of commercial virtue. Fred was born with a passion for natural history and a chronic incapacity for business.

"Look at Withers!" old Mastin would say. "You don't catch *him* dreaming over a book for hours, or spending half a day lying under a tree doing nothing. *He* has n't got time to fool away. Time is money, sir, *money!* and what under the sun is going to become of you, I don't know." Whereupon Fred would make no answer, but would steal away to his beloved woods the moment it was possible, returning in the evening with his pockets stuffed out with priceless possessions, such as a bird's nest, the sloughed skin of a rattlesnake, a section of honeycomb from a bee-tree, or the like, and stealing in at the back door would try to get up to his own room unseen, — expeditions that generally came to his father's knowledge and made fresh trouble, causing Mr. Mastin to dwell afresh on the ideal behavior of George Withers, to proclaim his son "incorrigible," and to ask with extreme fervor "what in the name of Heaven there was in the woods anyway to interest anybody!" It was true that George Withers would no more have dreamed of spending

a day in the woods than of spending a day in the water. He would have said — indeed he did say, when approached by Fred to that effect one day — that he "had n't time, he was too busy at the office." He never had time for anything, not even to go to church on Sunday, it being his practice to spend that day pretty much as he did Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, namely, at his desk; the only difference being that he devoted it to "posting" and "balancing" his Day-book and Ledger (the only books he had time to read), to elaborate calculations looking to future speculations, and to careful computations of past profits.

So much was his conduct approved of in Eureka that he soon came to be regarded as a "leading citizen." Not that he was a leader in anything. In his own phrase, he "took no stock in politics, he had n't time." In social matters it was even worse, for he visited nowhere, — for the same excellent reason. And we have seen how impossible it was for him to join in even the very occasional festivities of the little town. Still "society," as represented by certain respectable families with marriageable daughters, had its eye on "young Withers," and, not having a fanatical prejudice in favor of gentle blood or the Austrian code of breeding, would have made him welcome, and intended to graft him permanently on the distinguished stock of "the oldest settlers," in due time.

Miss Susan Briggs and Miss Jenny Pierce were already pulling caps over him, and setting caps at

him, exercising all their little maidenly wiles to fascinate him (under very great difficulties, it must be confessed, for it seemed that he had no time for either making love or seeing it made), when an event occurred that made it worse than useless for either of them to go on wearing pink calicoes, and putting up their abundant tresses in from twenty to fifty curl-papers every night. Miss Briggs, all irresistible loveliness, had been hanging herself over her "pa's" front gate as temptingly as possible three times a day for a month, in order to get a word with George Withers as he hurried to and from his meals, and Miss Pierce was actually talking to, or rather talking *at* him in the Briggs grounds (where he had been induced to "stop a minute" one afternoon, and the three were walking about together, the girls sweetly encircling each other's waists the while, and more than usually curled and oiled and bergamoted), when a young woman, a stranger, passed by, — a handsome young woman arrayed in other than Eurekan fashions, a young woman with a quick step, a pretty foot, a neat waist, and an audacious challenge in her large and bold black eyes. One glance was shot over the trim white palings, — only one; and as no prophetic thrill of defeat ran warningly through Napoleon's mind when he heard Wellington's name for the first time, so the allied forces of Briggs and Pierce little dreamed that the enemy was literally at their gates, and had begun to spike their guns.

In a few days it was known all over Eureka that the newcomer was a Miss Lizzie Thomson, that she

was from St. Louis, and that she was "to be identified with the interests of the most flourishing town west of the Rockies." There was a notice to that effect, indeed, in the local column of the "Eureka Star," and an appeal was made to the community to "support her," on the ground that she had "cast in her lot" with them, — as a milliner; giving Miss Thomson the air of preferring to become an enterprising Eurekan at all hazards rather than remain "a denizen" of effete St. Louis. In three weeks it was equally well known that the reserved, cold model of all the business virtues, Mr. George Withers (as the "Star" now called a certain broker when it had occasion to allude to him), was chained to the triumphal car of the handsome milliner, and with every revolution of the wheels was being crushed and mangled, sentimentally, into pulp. That hard-headed and anything but soft-hearted son of finance was now as foolish as it was possible for him to become. He had a genuine attack of the great malady, and the process of induration which had begun when he left the convent, or rather had gone on with increased rapidity from that moment, was temporarily arrested.

The first thing that revealed to him the state of his feelings was that he "was n't fit for business." He gave two great proofs of the sincerity of his attachment by devoting time and money to the object of his preference. He actually spent one whole morning away from the office, and Monday morning at that. He visited a great deal now, but always at one house. He determined to marry, and,

having carefully estimated the cost of living *à deux*, bought as the first delicate, initial step of his courtship a valuable diamond ring, which he gave Miss Thomson that very evening; proceeded in a subsequent *tête-à-tête* to let her know what he was "wuth," and worked up a gradual commercial and sentimental crescendo that culminated in a plain offer to give her a check for ten thousand dollars on the day she became his wife. All who run may read such signatures; and, to show that he was in earnest, he actually filled up and signed the paper in question, and showed it to his charmer, who was very brisk and playful over it, ejaculating, "Law sakes! all that for *me*?" affecting to be hurt when he put it back into his pocket-book. "Why should I not have it *before* I am married?" she asked. But this was so rankly unbusiness-like that, infatuated as he was, Mr. Withers only buttoned up his coat and his sympathies at once, although the disguised request had been prefaced by the first "George" that he had heard from the fair Elizabeth's red lips. No other form of wooing could have appealed so powerfully to her. She was just the woman to appreciate its force and value; she felt the weight of every penny that was offered. But there were obstacles in the way of the fulfillment of Mr. Withers's wishes.

Truth to tell, he was not the only man in Eureka who had been attracted by the bar-maid beauty of the newcomer. He had a rival, whom Miss Thomson greatly preferred, — a lively and gallant dentist, whose jokes and compliments and stories were much

more to her taste than the somewhat dry and serious brevities that represented conversation with the more eligible suitor. For some time the result seemed doubtful. Encouraged by Miss Thomson's cavalier treatment of Mr. Withers's attentions, Miss Briggs took heart of grace, became extremely intimate with Miss Thomson, whom she habitually called "darling," and made generally the fourth member of the *partie carrée* that met in the milliner's neat front parlor every evening. Finally, a day came when Mr. Withers was moved by his inamorata's Herodian graces to an extent that made him willing to part with the half of his kingdom. "I 'll make it *fifteen*, Miss Lizzie," he said quite eagerly and humbly, as he was putting on his hat to leave the house; to which she replied that "she would think of it." She did think of it; and being a remarkably shrewd, clever woman, cold of heart and coarse in nature, she concluded that millinery and dentistry combined would not be likely to yield her fifteen thousand dollars in a lifetime; and as for affection, that was altogether too airy a consideration to be weighed in the balance with hard cash. "If he has made that much out of nothing, he will make more," she very sensibly argued, and visions of becoming a great lady flashed upon her mind and captivated her imagination.

The die was cast; her decision was made. She invited "the doctor," as she called the dentist, to tea next evening, and Miss Briggs and Mr. Withers. She arrayed herself in her best, to duly impress the one man with what he was getting and the other

with what he was losing, as well as to show Susan Briggs, incidentally, how absurd it was in *her* to have supposed for one moment that she could supplant such a superb creature as herself. She made liberal provision for the material wants of the party. And it was after an extremely festive meal, in which she encouraged the doctor to a point that led him into all sorts of playful excesses, from sheer lightness of heart and wild hilarity, — such as putting butter in Miss Thomson's tea instead of sugar, and tickling Miss Briggs into a state of arch resentment and unbridled giggles that was unutterably fascinating, — that the engagement was announced.

Its effect was sobering in the extreme to two persons present, and quite intoxicating to the third. For the remainder of the evening Miss Thomson retired ostentatiously to a sofa at one end of the room with Mr. Withers, and affected to be scarcely aware of the existence of doctors or Susans. In vain did the former gnash his teeth, metaphorically, and get off at long range some of his most killing puns; Elizabeth was deaf and blind. In vain did Miss Briggs seat herself at the piano, and shake over her plump white shoulders no less than six tiers of carefully arranged auburn curls, while she sang "Good-by, Darling," with searching pathos, and stopped impressively in the refrain at "there is no parting *there*," to give forcible expression to this sweet truth by jerking a fat thumb up toward the whitewashed ceiling. Mr. Withers was blind and deaf.

A month later George Withers and Elizabeth

Thomson became man and wife, and, unimaginative as he was, some vivid pictures of a sweet wife and a happy home crossed his mind as, in obedience to a suggestion from somebody (he never knew from whom it came), he "saluted the bride."

CHAPTER II

Once married, Mr. Withers felt that he had wasted quite time enough in sentimental and unremunerative ways, and plunged into business with renewed ardor. He sorely begrudged the three days that were consumed in the wedding journey, and before the honeymoon was out, grew so restless and fidgety that his wife suggested they should return to Eureka at once, a proposal caught at with eagerness and acted on with promptness.

"It is all foolishness, anyway," said he, in semi-apology, as they got into the stage which was to take them back again. "We can be jest as happy there as anywhere. Don't you say so, Liz? And I 'll be right on the spot if anything should turn up. I know everything goes wrong the moment my back is turned, and it is no use writing. It only makes matters worse. It 's strange. My business is all as plain as the nose on my face, and I could attend to it, it seems to me, if I was asleep, but nobody else can see it, somehow, or do the least thing like it ought to be done. This thing of loafing around Denton all day, with like as not Tunstall from 'Frisco waiting to see me, and calling at the office twice a day, is too much for me. Why, I am losing, not counting my expenses, more than fifty dollars a day by i !"

Denton, a somewhat larger town than Eureka, had no very great charms for Mrs. Withers, and she was at heart no more anxious to prolong the uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* of the situation than he was, but she was woman enough to resent his attitude in the matter.

"Oh, well! If you are tired of me already, of course we 'd better go home," she said. "You don't get married every day. I should 'a' thought you could spare a week in a lifetime, but it seems you can't."

"You ought n't to take it that way, Liz," he expostulated. "It ain't that I am tired of you. But we 've got to go back some time, and it 'pears to me we may as well go first as last. And my business is young. It 's got to be nursed careful; it can't be left. A smart woman like you must see that. I am sorry to take you, if you don't want to go. If you like, I 'll let you go back and stay as long as you want in Denton, and I 'll come over when I can. But I can't stay there and try to settle things from there. I 'd sooner have my beard pulled out, a hair at a time, for worry. I expect it will take me a week to straighten out my books, as it is. And there 's nothing to see in Denton, as I can see, and nothing to do, and you don't know nobody. What do you want to stay for?"

"I don't want to stay. I don't care nothing about it," she replied emphatically. "I 'd just as lieve go back as stay, and liever."

"That 's right. That 's a sensible woman. I 'll make it up to you. I 'll take you a nice tri , next —

well, some time or other," he replied, and congratulated himself upon having met so little opposition from her, little dreaming that he had chilled a tiny germ of feeling that might have repaid culture, and that there were other things that required to be nursed besides his worldly prospects. He got out of the stage when it reached the principal street of Eureka, told the driver to take his wife on to the hotel, and said to her, "I 'll just run down to the office, Liz, and see what 's up. You know better than me what sort of room you want, — just go ahead and pick one out. Get a nice one; get two if you want 'em, and get 'em to suit yourself. Anything 'll suit me, — I ain't particular." With this he waved his hand to the driver as an intimation that, the conference with his wife being at an end, the stage could go on, and turning to the right, walked rapidly away in the direction of his office.

His thoughts were not altogether of business as he made his way. "How peart and handsome Liz is to-day; and smart as a steel trap or as the next one is Liz," he reflected. "She shall have the finest house in Eureka before many years go over her head, if I know anything about it. She kinder wanted to stay in Denton, I believe, but she behaved sensible. And what was the use? Setting around on the hotel piazza from morning till night, not earning a red cent." Comfortably established at the hotel, the newly married pair entered upon a phase of life that is too familiar and too much a part of the common experience in America to need much description. Mr. Withers rose early and late

took rest. He ate the bread of carefulness, and drank nothing stronger than the coffee of the establishment (a wretched decoction of chicory), bolted all his meals silently and swiftly for the most part, read the stock quotations once a day, and for the rest talked business, thought business, transacted business diligently and unceasingly, going to his office at eight in the morning, ill or well, winter and summer, rain or shine, returning after midnight oftener than not in the busy season of the year, and at best rarely before nightfall.

As for his wife, she reigned as acknowledged queen of the shabby-genteel little kingdom in which she found herself, had the best rooms in the hotel, made all the withering remarks about the *cuisine* of the establishment, wore the finest dresses she could get, changed them as often as possible, conducted a mild flirtation with her former admirer, the "doctor," and marked for her own every good-looking man that stopped at the house. She patronized tremendously a modest, nice little woman who had come out there from Maryland to "get her own living" in the territory to which she had been called, if not "the state." She gave extremely select card parties in her rooms, from which this lady was carefully excluded, on the ground that she was "nothing but a school-marm."

Thanks to her husband's money, she led, according to the hotel standard, an ideal existence, and was the envy of all the women of her acquaintance. That is, she could afford to dress more richly, to idle more persistently, to gossip with more authority,

and spend money more lavishly than any of them. And her florid charms were precisely the ones to be appreciated in Eureka by the other sex, and gained for her the reputation of being "the most stylish and smartest lady in the city," — a reputation which she certainly enjoyed and did her best to deserve. So that altogether she was well content with the life she was leading, and was not too pleased when her husband came home one evening and announced that he had made twenty thousand dollars "at a clip," and had bought Judge Brett's house, "a little ways out of town." She was so unenthusiastic, indeed, and received the news with such coldness, that he was quite hurt by her dubious air, and remonstrated with her. "Why, what's the matter with you, Liz? Hainh? I thought you would jump right out of your skin for joy, and you ain't even pleased. Ain't it big enough? or fine enough?"

"No, it ain't that, but you kinder took me by surprise. The door was on the jar, and I didn't hear you come in, for one thing," she replied diplomatically.

"Oh, pshur! that ain't it. Fool who? You don't like the idee, Liz. Why don't you come out and say so," he replied, as he plunged his face into a basin of water, — a face red with anger, or perhaps only suffused with blood in consequence of being held down in that position, and freely splashed and rubbed by its energetic owner.

"Well, maybe I don't. It's out in the country, and how are we going to get in? for one thing," she confessed partially, and then added, "Of course it's

all very fine. A splendid place. But we 'll find it ill-convenient."

"Oh, if that 's all, you can have a kerridge; a one-horse concern won't cost much to buy and keep," Mr. Withers replied. But that was not all, and Mrs. Withers still looked dubious. She reviewed the case rapidly in her own mind. It was a grand thing, she felt, to have Judge Brett's house, which had twelve rooms, and large white wooden pillars, and was considered in Eureka in much the same light that the Capitol is in Washington, or the Tuileries in Paris, but it would be, as she put it mentally, "horrid lonesome." There would be no one to see her, no matter what she wore. There would be no one to burn incense before her, or amuse her as she was in the habit of being amused; no one to flatter her, or envy her, no one to talk to, or talk about. She hated the idea. In the same way the thought of having a carriage of her own to ride in was extremely gratifying to her particular order of pride, but she could come in town only once a day, and she would have to go out again after an hour or two. "George will be at his office pretty near all the time, and when he comes home he never has anything much to say. All he wants is to get his supper and go to bed. I know it will be dull as ditch-water," she reflected.

So strong was the impression made by this last thought that she resolved to stay where she was, and with that end in view, she began to make excuses and explanations, and to give every reason but the real one for doing it. She talked very plausibly,

and was full of the flattery and cajolery she was in the habit of employing with her husband, as she set forth that she was perfectly willing to go anywhere with him, but that housekeeping was "a great bother," and it would be difficult to get good servants, and they were "fixed up so nice" where they were, with everything so "tasty" about them, and so "convenient to the office." But somehow Mr. Withers was not deceived. He was a truthful man, and a clear-sighted one. His experience of the world, as far as knowledge of men and motives was concerned, was already extensive, and his shrewd sense had begun already to reject the fictions that his wife invented to suit her purposes; to doubt the love that protested too much; to suspect the motives, arts, and blandishments of the sinuous partner of his joys. He felt dimly that his usual luck in such risky transactions as "futures" had deserted him.

But he was not yet ready to admit that he doubted. Like many other Americans of the commercial class (at once the most practical and sentimental in the world), he combined in his character the most apparently conflicting and irreconcilable traits, and, to use an unpoetical simile, was constructed on the principle of a double-barreled gun. In business matters and at his office he was as hard as the iron shutters that his clerk grumblingly shifted into position at dusk every evening; as keen and acute as a man very well could be, and as quick to take advantage of every point in his own favor; as little disposed to yield anything to those claims

of pity, justice, mercy, that came to him through business channels or connections, as if he had been one of the stone statues of Commerce with which Exchanges are so liberally ornamented. He never paid a doubtful check in his life, nor renewed a bill unless it was entirely to his interest to do so, nor hesitated to foreclose a mortgage, nor went security for the smallest amount, nor waited the briefest time to claim his own, no matter who suffered or what was promised; and as for *trusting*, it is doubtful whether he would have credited one of the Rothschilds, without the usual securities, for the most modest amount.

But strange to say, he laid aside a great deal of this with his office coat, and at home was the orthodox American husband, indulgent almost to weakness, unexacting, yielding, a generous provider, willing to play the rôle of matrimonial coolie to the end of the chapter, and not only willing but anxious to give his wife every advantage and pleasure possible. He was not naturally soft hearted, but he had married from affection, and if he had made a different choice, it would certainly have powerfully influenced his whole nature and consequently his whole life. The love, courage, faith, sympathy, of a good wife at this period would not only have given him the highest happiness that it was possible for him to know, but would have developed the utmost good that was in him, the utmost nobleness of which he was capable. The grain of this soul was not, indeed, of the finest, but what of that? Oyster-shells are not the most beautiful of testaceous structures, —

they lie deeply imbedded in their native mud, and are washed by but shallow waters of cloudy hue for the most part, — but each of them has its lining of pearly white.

And in the same way no man is so plain, rough, and ordinary, or so lowly placed, or so dull, but some sweet woman nestling in his heart can make it all beautiful within, with fair, prismatic tints of the most delicate peace, purity, tenderness; spreading the veil of her charity over all that is unsightly and defective, and often converting by the might of her patient love even its worst passions into so many pearls. What George Withers might have become with his genius for affairs, his strong will, his extraordinary force of resolution, his robust health, and capacity for prolonged, unremitting toil, aided by an incarnate providence to guide and help, inspire and restrain, can never be known. It is impossible to estimate the influence of such a woman upon any life, especially a busy one, spent in absorbing but not ennobling pursuits that tend to narrow instead of widening the sympathies, to blunt rather than quicken the conscience, and to injure the intellectual faculties by concentrating them all upon one point, and giving them only such food and exercise as conduce to carrying that point, the end in view being neither intellectual nor spiritual, nor in any way beneficent, but altogether selfish and personal.

We shall see what he did become, and we have seen what his wife was, — a woman who had married him as housemaids change their places, to "better" her condition.

After an angry discussion of the Brett place, that lasted until the bl; tant gong of the hotel summoned them to the plentiful, scrambling meal that awaited them, Mrs. Withers, flushed with victory, stopped to add a touch of rouge to her cheeks, to arrange afresh the small curls that were glued to her forehead at regular intervals, to put on a thick coat of powder and a good deal of jewelry, and this done, she followed her husband into the dining-room, where a wealth of stone china was spread out on a checked red cloth, and a number of "guests" were executing the most alarming manœuvres with their knives and forks in their efforts to gulp down fifteen dishes in ten minutes.

Entering the room with that haughty proprietary air which is apt to characterize the very great people of very small places of public entertainment, she seated herself, or rather enthroned herself, in her usual seat, pushed away disdainfully the not too inviting dishes that had been placed there in anticipation of her arrival, and while they were being removed and replaced by others, stared about her with studied *hauteur* and indifference. Her eyes soon fell upon a stranger, newly arrived, seated exactly opposite her at the end of the long table, wandered that way again and again, and were finally almost riveted there. She asked her husband in a stage whisper who "the lady down there" was, and he, being both sulky and hungry, replied, between two enormous mouthfuls, without looking up, "Dunno." She repeated the question a moment later, when her most intimate friend joined her, a Mrs. Handy, wife

of a "dry-goods" clerk, and toady in chief to Mrs. Withers. Mrs. Handy was better informed than Mr. Withers, and more communicative; in fact, bursting to give that very piece of information.

"That 's the wife of a big St. Louis man, — wuth millions and millions. De Trobriand is the name. Ever heard of 'em?" she whispered.

Mrs. Withers had heard of them, and confessed it as follows: "Lor'! yes. My! You don't say so! Well, I never! Everybody in St. Louis knows about them. What are they doing out here? What did they come for?"

Mrs. Handy knew that, too, even better than the De Trobriands themselves, and proceeded to give a highly colored account of Mr. De Trobriand's ill health, his wealth, his cares and responsibilities as president of two railroads and owner of property without end. He was "as rich as cream;" he had come out there "to buy up the legislature;" he commanded her respect in every way. And as for his wife, "anybody could see what she was." Mrs. Withers listened with royal condescension, disputed certain statements, confirmed others, and said in reply to the last: "Well, that dress she 's got on is nothing but cashmere. I wonder, if she is so rich, why she don't dress better. But there 's *something* 'bout her." She devoted herself during the remainder of that meal to finding out what that something was. It was that indefinable but unmistakable everything which proclaims the lady, but Mrs. Withers only saw that day that the despised cashmere was, after all, "wonderfully stylish."

On the next she observed some other things, — the immaculateness of Mrs. De Trobriand's simple linen collar, and the fineness of her plain handkerchiefs. In a week she had the outer woman by heart: the gentle manner, so quiet and yet full of dignity, the low voice that differed in accent and inflections from those about her so widely, the refined grace of all her movements. In two she had begun to feel the awakening of all sorts of voiceless aspirations and dumb ambitions. At first she wished to attract Mrs. De Trobriand's attention and show her what her position in the hotel was. She tried that, and talked in a loud and carefully medicated way of herself as a "St. Looian;" of what it had cost to fit up her rooms; of her husband's successful speculations. She drove the negro waiter who attended to that table quite wild by her exactions and complaints. She wore all her finest clothes, and came down to breakfast one morning with a gold chain wound in and out of her luxuriant black tresses. But before the meal was over she looked up and caught a gleam of — was it disgust or amusement in Mrs. De Trobriand's eyes? and somehow she blushed hotly and felt extremely discontented for the first time with her toilette, and moderated her voice considerably.

She was annoyed with herself for feeling such respect for the opinion of a woman who was a stranger, and nothing to her, — a woman who had worn the same dress every day since she came; but she could not help it. Mrs. Handy, who was densely stupid, was almost equally interested by the stranger,

but was not affected at all in the same way. They both made certain advances to her, and Mrs. Withers had a great curiosity to hear her talk, but beyond a slight bow and an "I beg your pardon" from Mrs. De Trobriand, when they accidentally came into contact in the doorway one day, or a civil acknowledgment of such small civilities as the offer of a newspaper, or of some dish at the table, there was no intercourse between them. It could not be said that Mrs. De Trobriand's manner was repellant, yet Mrs. Withers, with all her boldness, was awed by it, and it was a deep vexation to her to see the reserve that she divined but could not define, much less resent, disappear under certain circumstances; for instance, to watch the object of her secret admiration talking frankly and pleasantly to the "schoolmarm," whom she had been in the habit of despising. Nor did it put her in a better humor to have it explained by Mrs. Handy as follows: "You see, she 's got edgercation. She talks grammar at her. And she demeans herself to her." Growing-pains are disagreeable things, and the truth was that an idea had been planted in Mrs. Withers's mind that was destined not only to take root, but to be as productive as ever the poppy could be with its thirty-two thousand seeds to a flower, or the tobacco-plant with its three hundred and sixty thousand.

When Mr. De Trobriand was well enough to come to the table, Mrs. Withers divided her gaze so as to include the husband, and in the same way "took in" the material and fit of his well-cut clothes and all the "properties" of first walking gentleman on

the social stage. She could not despise him as heartily as Mrs. Handy did for parting his hair in the middle. The way in which he used his napkin, a dreadful red affair that matched the cloth, quite fascinated her, and the little sniff of disgust with which his nose wrinkled, and his heavy mustache drooped, when, fancying himself unobserved, he rolled it up neatly, replaced it in its holder, and, whispering something to his wife that made her laugh a little, under protest, got out his own handkerchief and passed it slowly across his lips, was a subject for serious thought for one observer. She had supposed the hotel a place of elegant resort, and had been proud of being able to live there. Those very napkins she had regarded with great complacency, often, as another proof that she was "living in style."

She did not know whether to resent the disapproval which the strangers showed of many things in their surroundings in little ways that expressed the more for being devoid of anger or insolence (a nod, a smile, a suggestion; sometimes merely a wondering look from Mr. De Trobriand, or one of mild astonishment from his wife, when a perfectly remarkable compound of unknown ingredients and properties was plumped down suddenly in front of them); or whether to admire a *savoir faire* that offended all her prejudices, but gained her respect. Mrs. Withers, who was always affecting to be vastly superior to her surroundings, recognized with surprise that these people were really so, yet were trying to conceal the fact. It made her thoughtful,

and she observed them more closely than ever as opportunity served, usually at meals. A great deal that they said to each other reached her, although they spoke in a low tone, so eager was she to catch it, and that in spite of the noisy clatter and bustle of the place. She bridled and minced a little, and moistened her lips frequently when Mr. De Trobriand, becoming aware of the interest excited, returned some of the glances she lavished in his direction; but she shriveled into a grain of mustard seed when Mrs. De Trobriand, who was near-sighted, put up her glass with modest inoffensiveness and looked at her that evening.

"A handsome woman," the husband had said, and Mrs. Withers had heard him. "Are you serious?" his wife had asked, her inspection ended, and Mrs. Withers heard that, too. That was all, but she felt that it was voluminous. Mr. De Trobriand, being a man, had been struck by a fine physique; his wife, being a woman, could not imagine how it was possible for a "creature" to be thought handsome who wore chains in her hair at breakfast, and was generally so conspicuous and, from her standpoint, objectionable. No amount of culture would have prevented him from admiring such a pair of eyes, such a foot, and such a form; and no amount of charity could have blinded her to the "kiss-me-quick" curls and the rouge and the cotton lace, to say nothing of the jewelry before her. This radical difference in the lenses through which the sexes look at most things leads to endless misconceptions and makes trouble enough sometimes, but in this

instance it only made Mr. De Trobriand think his wife "extremely critical," and convinced her that he was "extremely susceptible." The enthusiasm of the Missourian magnate never went beyond an occasional glance at his neighbor, and Mrs. Withers's strongest feeling on the subject was that she would "give anything if Mr. Withers was only stylish." To be "stylish" was the *ne plus ultra* of achievement for her. She thought herself stylish, and naturally felt that it was a pity that her spouse should not be a better match for her in that respect. That there could be two styles, a bad and a good, and that she could be a conspicuous illustration of the first, did not immediately occur to her. Mrs. De Trobriand's look and speech, however, rankled in her mind.

"I *am* handsome, a sight better looking than she is, or ever will be in all her born days," she reflected, catching sight of her own image in the glass. "What did she mean?" The unknown quantity in the mental estimate that she saw had been formed of her annoyed her more and more as she thought of it. The leaven of discontent which was to make her rise in the world had begun its work. "It must have been something wrong with my *dress*," she concluded, and from that moment she inaugurated the first of a series of tentative processes which were to culminate in — not a lady, certainly, but an admirable imitation of one. Next morning Mrs. Withers tried to put up her hair in the way Mrs. De Trobriand wore hers, added the gold chain, was not satisfied with the effect, took the whole structure down,

and decided on a less elaborate and chainless coiffure of the same general style as the one she ordinarily adopted. There was hesitation in the same way over a necklace that she had been in the habit of wearing, and she left it off, — but at the last moment added another pair of wide gold bracelets of elaborate design. It was impossible to at once renounce her most cherished pomps and favorite vanities.

The two prominent families in the town were those of Judge Brett and Doctor Middleton, and with these the De Trobriands were soon on pleasant terms, a fact that greatly impressed Mrs. Withers, who had long hungered and thirsted for the honor of bare acquaintance with them. Going into the parlor one day, where her lively friends the doctor and Miss Briggs were awaiting her, she found established at the other end of the room Mrs. Brett, Mrs. Middleton, and Mrs. De Trobriand, and it did not take long for her to observe the difference between the two sets of guests. The doctor, who was now trying to enslave Miss Briggs, was uncommonly brisk and facetious, to be sure, and Miss Briggs was all giggles, and blushes, and arch sportiveness, but Mrs. Withers was not in a mood to enjoy the society of either. The doctor, without permission or apology, dropped down on the sofa between the two ladies, and began, cheerfully enough if not with striking originality, "Well! here I am! A rose between two thorns! Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

"You'd better say a cabbage," rejoined Miss Briggs, with a toss of her curls.

"Now, Miss Sue, I wonder at you! To say that to my face," remonstrated the doctor, with a killing glance.

"Oh, pshur! Go 'long. Don't you be so smart. There 's worse things than that to be said about your face, I can tell you. Ain't there, Liz? You 'd be as mad as a settin' hen ef you knowed what me and Liz thinks of you. Would n't he, Liz?"

"I don't know, I 'm sure," said Mrs. Withers, withdrawing into the corner as much as possible, and glancing toward the other group.

"You are fishing for compliments, Miss Sue, that 's what. You want to find out what I think of you," retorted the doctor; "but 'praise to the face is open disgrace.'"

"I fish in a *river* when I fish; I don't fish in a *crik*. And when you was settin' up to Liz, here, you did n't think it no disgrace to praise *her*. And if I was you, I would n't say nothin' 'bout faces, noway, bein' all covered over with freckles jes' like a turkey egg," replied Miss Briggs, with a sudden jealous remembrance of past relations between her two friends. "'Two 's company and three 's none,' so here 's good-by to you; I 'm goin' to play on the pianner."

With this she rose and bounced over to where a much-abused asthmatic instrument stood (very much scratched and battered as to the woodwork, yellow and dumb as to keys, and shrilly tinkling as to tone), and, seating herself, began to strum and rattle away with an immense affectation of being absorbed in what she was doing. With many swayings of her

body and other mannerisms, such as bending forward as if engaged in a critical examination of the intricacies of her own fingering, throwing back her head in rapt enjoyment of the harmonies she was producing, and much crossing of hands, lifting of hands, and sudden frenzied scampering attacks on the bass clef, followed by almost inaudible *pianissimos* in the treble, Miss Briggs went through portions of all the most important pieces in her *repertoire*, — only portions, perhaps because of the unworthiness of the audience to hear all. Napoleon stopped halfway in crossing the Rhine; the Fisher never finished his Hornpipe; and the Battle of Prague was not half fought out, Miss Briggs glancing about her the while to see what effect she was producing on both her friend, her admirer, and the strangers present.

"Play 'O! Miss Lucy, don't you cry, your sweetheart will come bimeby,' " called out the doctor, pleased rather than otherwise by this coquettish abandonment, and agreeably conscious of his ability to calm the musical and emotional tempest he had aroused.

"Play the cat's foot!" exclaimed Miss Briggs, with great scorn. "I ain't playin' for you; I'm playin' for myself, and nobody else," and went back to the Hornpipe again, with more lurchings and tossings and crossings than ever, only to break off again suddenly in the middle of a bar and rejoin her friends.

Looking up, Mrs. Withers saw that Mrs. De Trobriand was holding her fan to her face, and that Mrs. Brett had turned her back squarely around.

"They are laughing at us. Sue Briggs has been making a fool of herself," she thought angrily. The fan was dropped the next instant, and the two ladies maintained a look of quite preternatural gravity during the remainder of the doctor's visit; but Mrs. Withers saw that it cost them an effort. There had never been any difference of taste in the jokes of the trio before, but now the refined banter of the doctor and the responsive sallies of Miss Briggs were most distasteful to Mrs. Withers, who contributed nothing but monosyllables to the conversation.

The fact was that she was abstracting herself from it as much as possible, in order to hear as much as she could of another. She overheard "Eurekan society, you know, my dear," from Mrs. Brett in an undertone, and some other fragments, to which she gave her own interpretation. She heard Mrs. De Trobriand say, "We are going home in a few days. My husband has made the investments he expected to make, and there is nothing now to detain us. We should both like to see more of the country, and of our friends here, but the truth is," — glancing about her she caught Mrs. Withers's eye, and lowered her voice, — "you know what it is like here. I do so pity that nice little Marylander, Miss Phipps, condemned to live here. Think of *living* in this hotel always! Would n't you rather have a home of your own that was no bigger than a thimble? Can you understand it? She can't help it, but" — Mrs. Brett's reply was not audible, but Mrs. Withers was too absorbed in her own reflections to miss it.

"What 's the matter with you to-day, Liz? You must er put the wrong foot out er bed first this morning. You are as lively as a pea on a hot shovel generally, and here you 've been settin' mum chance ever since I come," said Miss Briggs banteringly, noticing her preoccupation.

"There ain't nothing the matter," asserted Mrs. Withers, with dignity, "only I 've had 'bout enough of your foolishness for onst."

"Well, seein' as you are so perlite, I reckon we may as well slope. Come, doc, 'less you want to stay. My! but you are fixed up elegant here!" said Miss Briggs, preparing to leave.

The doctor, thus adjured, rose too.

"Well, goo'-by! Tell George 'Howdy' for me. I have n't saw him for two months, I believe. Goo'-by," said Miss Briggs, and kissed Mrs. Withers loudly.

"Don't I wish that was me!" commented the doctor from the rear, and laughed uproariously over the delicate suggestion. Miss Briggs turned upon him in mock anger and seemed about to rend him, but she only shook her parasol in his face. "Ef you talk like that, I 'll give you a smack sure enough!" she said threateningly.

"That 's what I want, as I was saying," retorted the doctor, seizing her hand. Cries of "Stop that! Lemme 'lone! Let go!" now went up from the mock-alarmed Miss Briggs, while the doctor stoutly refused to release the hand he held until he was given the promised "smack," which he finally got after quite a romp with his charmer, Mrs. Withers

looking on and calling out, "Ain't you ashamed of yourselves?" to mark her disapproval of what was going on, and the two ladies at the other end of the room stiffening visibly and drawing away their skirts morally from such a scene.

"My dear Mrs. De Trobriand, I really — I must go," said Mrs. Brett, rising hastily. Don't "think" — (a murmur).

"No, I ain't ashamed a scrap! *We are engaged*," proclaimed Miss Briggs, looking back at Mrs. Withers, and firing a Parthian shot as she retreated. And just at this moment who should appear in the door but Mr. Withers, looking rather more harassed and preoccupied than usual, and calling out, "Whur 's my coat at, Liz? I can't find it anywhurs."

And so all the occupants of the room went their several ways, the doctor, gallant to the last, clutching Miss Briggs's elbow and whispering, as a stage aside, "'The rose is red, the violet 's blue, sugar is sweet, and so are you!'" and displaying his best professional advertisement, his teeth, to any extent as he descended the stairs, Mrs. Brett and Mrs. Middleton following them, Mrs. De Trobriand and Mrs. Withers retiring to their respective apartments. It was very characteristic of Mrs. Withers to say nothing of what was uppermost in her thoughts. She found her husband's coat for him in silence, and then got into a rocking-chair and rocked swiftly backwards and forwards for some time. The flush on her cheeks and the angry, set expression of her features, as she sat there, attracted her husband's attention.

"What 's the matter, Liz?" he asked. "You 've seemed sorter put out a good deal lately. Want any money?"

"No, I 've got all the *money* I want!" replied Mrs. Withers curtly. She was not in a mood for explanations.

"I hope you ain't bearin' any malice 'bout the words we had the other day? I don't care much whur we live, so *you* are satisfied," said he, making another attempt to find out what had gone wrong.

Mrs. Withers burst out with, "I wish you would n't call me 'Liz' any mo'; call me Elizabeth, that 's my name," very irrelevantly, as he thought.

"Well, Liz or Lizbeth, it 's all one to me," conceded Mr. Withers, who was meekness itself in such matters. "But that ain't it. That ain't what 's pestering you, is it? It is money, ain't it? I reckon you have been running up bills, or paying 'em without taking no receipts. Now ain't you?"

"No, it ain't. It 's got nothin' to *do* with money," replied Mrs. Withers. "That 's all you think about. It 's — it 's — Sue Briggs may be an old friend of yours, George, but I 'm *done* with her, — and all such. I 'm going to do different. I am going to" — She did not finish; the lines about the lower part of her face became more fixed and resolute than ever, her eyes were bright with excitement. "Do, for goodness gracious sake, brush your hair! It 's settin' out all over your head like a porkypine's!" she burst out. "And here, put on this here cravat. Don't you see that one 's dirty and horrid?" The supper bell now rang, and Mr. Withers was rather

glad to have a period to put to the conversation, inasmuch as storm signals were flying, but he was not allowed to proceed immediately to the dining-room.

"You don't want your hair slicked down like that," said his wife, looking discontentedly at his head, which had been hastily attacked with a wet brush. "Come here!" So saying she seized a comb, and with energetic asperity went to work and altered the parting, which was just above the left ear. She shifted it a full inch nearer the middle of his head, with a vivid image of Mr. De Trobriand's well-clipped, carefully brushed cranium in her mind the while, and after a good many reforming touches grasped the ends of his cravat angrily and untied them, retied them to suit herself, and let her eye wander lower and rest upon a calfskin "vest" of a style much in vogue in Eureka at that period. She had her doubts about that garment now.

"Why don't you fix up? You 've got the money to do it," she remarked pettishly. "You *air* the greatest old slouch!"

Arrived in the dining-room, Mrs. Withers did not take her usual seat by Mrs. Handy. She was about to begin drawing a certain line of demarcation, and to her husband's surprise took a chair near the De Trobriands', and nodded toward another that she meant him to occupy.

When Mrs. Handy came in, she joined them, not understanding the underlying motive of the change.

"What are you settin' here for?" she asked, in surprise, and Mrs. Withers replied, with much

assumption of dignity, "I can set where I please, I reckon. Not that it matters, for I ain't a-going to be here long."

"Why, whur are you goin' to?" demanded Mrs. Handy, almost at the same moment with Mr. Withers's "Hainh? What 's that?"

"I 'm going to a house of my own. My husband has bought Judge Brett's house for me," replied Mrs. Withers, looking across at the De Trobriands. "I never had no idea of staying in such a place as this."

"Well! Ef that don't take the rag off the bush!" exclaimed Mrs. Handy vivaciously. "Why, I thought — Why, what air you goin' to do that fur? Ain't you got everything here you want?"

"Liz — that is, Liz*beth*, you are doing this to pleasure me," said Mr. Withers. "But don't you, now. I ain't calculatin' to go to no place that you don't like to go to. We 'll stay right here, being all fixed to stay, as you say."

"But I don't want to stay. I was agreeable to it at first because it is near your office, hubby, and more convenient for you; but as you are willing to take my say-so, I am not going to live here no longer, when I can have the most elegant house in the place and as many entertain*ments* as I want," said Mrs. Withers, and looked about her to see what impression she was making.

The De Trobriands, of course, had the air of not having heard the little speech intended for them, but Mrs. Handy was very loud and lengthy in her felicitations, which were received coolly enough.

"You've give in to pleasure me," persisted Mr. Withers, "and I'll make it up to you, Liz. You can have three thousand in hard cash to fix up with."

"She'll make it elegant; the finest house, you'll say so yourself, that ever you see in all your born days. She's just the one to do it. Mercy, me! I wish I had somebody to give *me* three thousand dollars!" said Mrs. Handy, with much enthusiasm and real regret. "I'll trouble you for the punkin pie, Mr. Withers."

"Is that all?" inquired Mrs. Withers of her husband, affecting surprise. "Well! maybe I can do it on that. But my carriage ain't coming out of it, Presh, that's shore and certain."

When Mrs. Withers was pleased, she had a number of names for her husband, of which "Presh," for precious, stood for the high-water mark of matrimonial endearment; and he was not insensible to the compliment it conveyed, as was proved by his saying, "Well! I reckon I am in for the whole hog."

Mrs. Handy laughed uproariously at this sally, and Mr. Withers put a villainous felt hat on the back of his head and a toothpick in his mouth, and hurried away to his office with a guilty feeling that he ought to have been there at least a half hour earlier.

As the De Trobriands left the room, he said to his wife, "Would n't you like to go to some of those entertain*ments*?" and seemed to require no answer to the question. The image that he had called up in his own mind of his fastidiously refined wife at

one of Mrs. Withers's parties sufficed him, and, throwing back his handsome head, he laughed long, if not loud.

As they rolled off in the stage which was to take them to Denton the day following, Mr. and Mrs. De Trobriand enumerated with considerable satisfaction all that had been accomplished during their stay in Eureka. Little as they suspected it, there was one thing that ought to have been added. They had given Mrs. Withers a standard, and had begun her education. At that very moment she was reading the announcement of their departure in the "Eureka Star," and pondering over the statement that Mrs. De Trobriand was "one of St. Louis's most elegant society leaders," and Mr. De Trobriand its "most notorious millionaire." The "Star" meant, of course, to say that Mr. De Trobriand was celebrated, and was even more unfortunate in speaking of his ill health, which had "culminated from rheumatic fever" the winter before, when "fears were entertained of his recovery." Mrs. Withers, not being sensitively alive to a nice derangement of adjectives and prepositions, found no fault with the article, and unquestionably got the gist of the matter. She sat for two hours in deep thought after the "Star" had fallen flutteringly at her feet.

A "society leader." What made a woman that? How had Mrs. De Trobriand got to be that? What was it necessary to do or be, in order to become one? Was she born a society leader, or was it a thing to be achieved? Did she owe it to her talents, or to her husband's money? The more she

thought of it, the more interesting the subject grew. The pricking uneasiness she had always felt in thinking of the Bretts and Middletons returned with undoubted force. It was clear that, in order to lead society, it was necessary to be in society. All the unformulated hopes, desires, and ambitions of her past life crystallized suddenly into one hope, desire, ambition. She had triangulated, as it were, and got the exact point at which she wished to arrive, and that was to be a society leader. "Why not?" she thought. "I'm handsome; I'm smart; and George is going to make a plenty of money. He's going to lay up *a pile*. He'll give me all I want. Why not?"

It was a delicious dream, and when she had reveled fully in it, and seen herself leading society in velvet and diamonds, and her husband "a notorious millionaire," she came back to earth again and her sitting-room in the hotel, — to certain practical considerations. Society in Eureka must be the first link in the long golden chain she had begun to weave. The question narrowed itself down to that. She must get into Eurekan society. Differently stated, she must know the Bretts, the Middletons, and their friends. Who were their friends? Whom did they know, and, more important still, refuse to know?

When Mr. Withers came home to dinner, he was received with all the honors. His wife threw herself into his arms, she kissed him repeatedly, she told him a great number of flattering things about himself, and surprised him by the warmth of her

conduct into an incautious admission. "I 've made another haul, Liz," he said; and immediately qualified his remark with, "Well, it ain't so much of a haul, but it 's something."

Mrs. Withers said nothing, but at six o'clock next morning she appeared at his bedside fully dressed for traveling. "Why, where — why, what — where are you gallivantin' to?" he exclaimed, in sleepy surprise.

"I 'm going to Denton, Presh, to git the things for the house. Send me a check for fo' thousand you promised me, 'less you want the bills sent to the office. No, send it anyways," she replied.

"I never promised no fo' thousand. I said you could have three," said Mr. Withers.

"Oh, pshur! *three*, after the haul you 've done made?" exclaimed his wife.

"Well, you can have fo', if you 'll get the carriage out of it," conceded Mr. Withers.

"I shall spend five," thought Mrs. Withers, as she embraced her lord and hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER III

FIVE thousand dollars judiciously expended in London, Paris, New York, and some other places will buy so much household stuff nowadays, of such artistic design, variety, and beauty, that a lady of this period would see endless vistas of "symphonies," "poems," "arrangements" in black, white, and every other color opening before her, if she had such a sum to spend. She could, after much brooding indecision, consultation of authorities, comparison, and careful selection, put it into cretonnes, carpets, curtains, furniture, pictures, books, bric-a-brac, — to say nothing of the little knick-knackeries that are as the foam to Aphrodite, diffused about them by women of refinement almost without thought or care, — which, fused into an harmonious *ensemble*, would satisfy the soul of an artist or poet. But Denton, at the time of which I write, was not London or New York, though every inhabitant that it had was as agreeably certain that it stood in the middle of the sky, as was the Roman knight who was always able to find the centre of everything in himself. I mention this fact with less regret because the place has since become vastly superior to either of those cities, if we may believe the people who live there, and presumably know whereof they speak. It boasted but a limited number of shops,

for one thing, the largest of which was that of Snodgrass & Blodgett, where the most incredibly ugly things were to be had for the most monstrous prices: gaudy, tasteless wares, picked up at random by one or other of the partners, and hauled in Mexican *caritas* hundreds of miles to their destination. It was not, then, a hard matter for Mrs. Withers to spend the money she had taken over to Denton, nor to get what was considered its equivalent. Not being a woman of taste, and never having had in her whole life such an opportunity to display her lack of it, she reveled in her "bargains," patronized the partners as well as the clerks of the firm extensively on the score of her purchases, and went back to Eureka quite swelling with importance as became, she thought, her position of dignified householder, and owner of "the most stylish equipage" in the place.

So exalted was her frame of mind that she did not even give to Miss Briggs the faint bat of her eyelids with which she had been acknowledging that young person's greetings for some time past. She felt herself lifted into quite another sphere already, as she cut Susan Briggs outright from the back seat of the stage on her way through the town, and that with a cool insolence and easy grace that showed the *mondaine* born. She almost felt as though she had achieved her dearest ambition already, and was "leading society" in so doing. Her husband got an amusing but garbled account of her expedition and expenditures, and she apologized for not having consulted him about the more important ones; but,

as he said himself, he was only too glad to be relieved of all care and responsibility in the matter. "I 'm glad to get shut of the whole thing," he confessed. "I ain't got the time to give, that 's a fact. Fix it up to suit yourself, Liz. I don't know *b* from a bull's foot, when it comes to fixing up a house. My place is right here in the orfus. You can 'tend to all that. But I 'll look over the bills of lading when they come."

This was something of a concession, but Mrs. Withers was not gratified by it. It was precisely what she wished to avoid. She was very lavish in praise of her husband's generosity for three days, and had no words to express her unbounded devotion to him. Then she confessed to having spent four thousand three hundred, thinking she would manage to get the other seven hundred in "somehow." When he asked if she was "sure that was all?" she replied with an air of entire candor that it was. Mr. Withers could not have explained why he felt unconvinced, but he did. His wife wrote off to Snodgrass & Blodgett to send her all the papers bearing on her purchases, and was soon absorbed in moving into her new house. She did not enjoy disposing of her new possessions the less, but rather the more for her duplicity, and gave all her energies to creating "a finer parlor than the Bretts's." What she really produced was an appalling reception-room, carpeted in glaring red and green, having an "elegant suite" of horsehair furniture much insisted upon by Mr. Snodgrass, with a "what-not" which Mr. Blodgett had said that he would "almost be willing to give

her" rather than that her establishment should lack the stamp of the highest fashion. There was much tribute of one kind or other on the altar she was raising to an unknown god: The four seasons, a most realistic study of a watermelon, with the very knife stuck in it which had been used to cut it in half, and the seeds brought out in such high relief that, as Mrs. Withers said, you could "count 'em;" two stands of wax flowers, protected by glass shades; a lamp-mat in green crewel; a footstool in red and white beadwork; a grass-green rug with an orange elephant on it in an attitude expressive of the greatest fury and rage. Mrs. Withers put up the Nottingham curtains, surmounted them with heavy gilt cornices, added red moreen lambrequins, looped them back with gilt tulips. She wheeled a marble-topped table into the centre of the room, and arranged on it some daguerreotypes and sea-shells, a china cup with the legend "Friendship's Offering" inscribed on it so that he who ran might read, a copy of "Thaddeus of Warsaw" liberally annotated with such critical comments as "Too true!" "How sweet!" "Perfect nonsense!" an album in crimson morocco and gilt, in which Mrs. Withers's friends had written themselves down, — unspeakable things. When religion had been represented by a glaring chromo, — a young woman, half submerged in a stormy sea, clinging frantically to a cross resting on nothing in particular, but wreathed with roses, — and art had received its *coup de grâce* in an oil painting representing a child in a pink satin frock yielding so far to those natural impulses that make all the

world kin as to bend over a basin and float a blue shoe on the water it contained, Mrs. Withers felt that there was nothing more to be done.

Nor was there. It was as finished and consummate an exposition of sincere vulgarity as even that dark age of household decoration could have shown. But such as it was, it struck awe into more than one Eurekan bosom. Mrs. Handy, on first being admitted into its darkened precincts, spoke of it in terms of ardent and most respectful admiration, and afterwards, on public occasions, noised abroad its splendors as reflecting some sort of credit on herself. She continued to pose as Mrs. Withers's most intimate friend, but she was not unconscious that her tenure of office was growing more uncertain every day, and privately agreed with Miss Briggs that Mrs. Withers was "stuck up." Other Eurekans, on the contrary, began to find that Mrs. Withers had "improved," and month by month names were added to her visiting list, and greetings multiplied for her wherever she went. The Bretts did not call, the Middletons passed by on the other side; but Mrs. Withers's was a waiting race, as she felt, and she was satisfied for the present with what she had achieved. When Blodgett & Snodgrass tired of the promises and fictions with which Mrs. Withers sought to pacify them, they sent their account to her husband, who paid it, and would then have liked to have a private settlement of his own with his wife. He attempted it, but Mrs. Withers took the matter up and carried it off with a high hand. After flaming out in the shrillest calliope

viragoism, she dissolved in tears and threatened to have hysterics. It was all for the house. She was not to blame at all. It was her husband who was miserly, and given to concealment. Did he suppose he had deceived her, and that she did not know that he had made a great deal of money lately? He was coining money, and she was not to get what was absolutely necessary for their home! It was a clear case of Ananias and Sapphira. Neither had been frank and told all the truth. Each was confirmed in the belief that it would not do to be frank. "If Liz had known what *I* know, she would have spent ten thousand instead of five," thought Mr. Withers, and determined to keep his business to himself.

"I 'll manage so as he won't find out, next time. I 'm going to have what I want," reflected the wife. "He 's got it, and I 'm going to spend it. I did n't marry him to set down here in the country and poke along, and be nothing, and do nothing. No-sir-ee-*bob*." This last was addressed in imaginary defiance to her husband, who was driving into Eureka at the moment, and whose thoughts were also of the recent interview. "Well, I reckon I 'll have to call it square. It did all go for the house. But Liz 'll euchre me every time, if I don't look out." Mrs. Withers laid aside her injured innocence as soon as her husband was out of sight, and dried her eyes, and tried on the dress that had just been sent home, made in exact imitation of the one Mrs. De Trobriand had worn. She dressed her hair after the same model to complete the effect, and looked

at herself in the glass for a long while critically. "It ain't to say becoming," she concluded, "but it is sorter genteel. That's it. It's genteel. I'll go East next summer and see what they are wearing." "They," in Mrs. Withers's mind, stood for leaders of society, and she speculated about them continually, — the select ladies among whom she hoped to be numbered some day.

A home the Withers did not have, after all, but a very common substitute for it, called by that sacred name, — a house in which they lived for the next five years. Three children were born to them in this time, a son and two daughters; and although it is true, as Victor Hugo says, that "a house without children is like a cage without birds," yet not even these additions to the household could make of it a home. Mr. Withers ate and drank and slept and dressed there; but he lived only at the office. Mrs. Withers did the same, substituting what she called "society" for business, or rather making a business of pleasure. The children lived apart from both parents in Babyland, — that beautiful Island of the Innocent set in a stormy sea, exposed to the fury of a thousand blasts, yet so sheltered and protected by God and the angels and good men that it is the safest, sweetest, serenest spot under the stars, an island of golden sands and blue skies and clear waters, of sunshine and singing birds. We have all lived in it, and love it, and have been exiled from it, but only the pure in heart can revisit it. The fronds of its palms touch the very floor of heaven, and its white-robed inhabitants, breathing

the air and using the speech of heaven, are joyous in a sad world, sinless in a wicked one, happy in a sorrowful one.

There was no altar and no hearth in this house. No morning prayer blessed and purified the day ; no evening lamp crowned it with its pleasant, shining hours of home-talk and home-light and home-love, its mutual exchange of confidence and sympathy and experience, its tidings from the outside world and fresh thought from the wider world of books. The gospel of getting on was alone preached or practiced there, and its light was a great darkness. It was to all intents and purposes just a private hotel. Mr. Withers grew more absorbed in business every day. To get to the " orfus " as early as possible, and stay there as late, was his one idea. As his wife had foreseen, when he did come home, it was to yawn, to eat, to fall asleep, having previously given strict instructions that he was to be called early on the following morning. Never a talkative man, he grew less and less communicative as the years went on. In truth, he had little to talk about except his business, and we have seen that he had his own reasons for keeping that to himself, — at least so far as the results of his speculations were concerned. Business oozed from him at every conversational pore, indeed, for the simple reason that he could think of nothing else ; but he soon saw that he could get neither intelligent nor sympathetic attention from his wife ; and not being able to talk of what interested him, he took refuge in silence.

It offended him, too, to find that Mrs. Withers

was very impatient of detail, and went at once to what she thought the only point of interest, — how much he had made by this or that transaction. "She don't care for me," he thought sombrely. "All she cares for is plenty of money to spend." And in this he was not mistaken. That was exactly what Mrs. Withers cared for. She was always dreaming of the future of her heart, and scheming to make it a reality. It did not so much offend as amuse her that he should jealously guard the secret of his gains. She laid various traps for him, hoping to glean something from his unguarded admissions; dug pits for him to fall into, and covered them over so carefully that the most wary and suspicious would not see them, she thought. But she learned nothing. She was not baffled, however, for she hit on the truth that there was something to conceal. "Oh, he is just rolling it up! He 's getting a pile!" she thought. It was coming fast, that golden future, and she would be ready for it. In her scheme of existence, domesticity was a thing to be endured when it could not be cured, and she had devoutly hoped, as she said from the first, that she would not have "a whole raft of brats;" yet when the children came, they brought with them as usual some luggage from the heavenly country, — one little piece, at least, labeled "love." In her way, then, Mrs. Withers loved her children, — not a tender way or a right way, made up as it was largely of pride, jealousy, selfishness, but still love, with occasional glints of diviner things. They served her chiefly at this period, and ever after, as

pegs on which to hang the rich fabrics of her hopes. The nebulous clouds of her dreams had suddenly developed into new worlds, and how they should shine in earth's firmament! They should look to her for everything rather than to their father. She would dress them; how richly and fashionably she would dress them! Educate them; what pains would she not take to educate them! And how she would marry them! For marry them she did, and that while they were all in their cradles. By that time the immense fortune that she confidently counted upon would be an accomplished fact; and to what alliances might they not aspire! It was clearly more important than ever that she should become a leader in society and fit herself for the exalted state to which she was hastening, remodel, arrange, alter a great many things, — herself, her habits, house, children, if possible her husband, though of this she was not very sanguine. She tried to lay down the broad lines of her future life, leaving the details to be studied and worked out at her leisure, but got confused at once. Where should she begin? What was she to do? Already her mental vision had cleared enough to show her that money alone would not accomplish the end she had in view, though she had once thought it all-sufficient.

After a long season of troubled reflection, in which she keenly felt her ignorance, and could not decide how to set about the work of reformation, she suddenly remembered one day Mrs. Handy's careless speech about the "school-marm," "gram-

mar," "education." These must be essentials, since they had put the poor teacher on a level with that grand Mrs. De Trobriand. She would begin with herself. She would get grammar and education. It must be that they could be had. Money would buy anything. But how was she to get it, she a grown, married woman? It was her habit to live chiefly in her bedroom, and there she gave many hours and days of thought to this problem, as she sat over her sewing, — fine needlework, in which she excelled, and over which she sat silent and absorbed, working with a kind of fierce energy to an accompaniment of eager, restless thoughts, plans, desires. Yes, she would study alone; she could not make the open confession of ignorance involved in employing a teacher. And having settled this much, she ordered from St. Louis a set of schoolbooks.

When his first-born son was laid in his arms, Mr. Withers was smitten with a sudden deep sense of parental obligation, and a chord thrilled in his heart that had been silent since the days when, a little lad, he had sat on the convent steps, all pride and delight at being allowed to nurse a baby-sister almost as big as himself, — a thrill of fond, protecting love that rushed out of some mysterious recess in his being and poured itself over the tiny creature before him in a perfect flood of feeling. The one tender memory that he had was touched, — that of the little child-flower that had long laid imbedded in his hard, secretive nature, very much as a delicately fragile fern imprints itself on slate. The rock was smitten, and there it was as fresh and per-

fect as though it had been made the day before. Tears rose to his eyes and fell, and so little was he prepared for any such demonstration that he was obliged to wipe them away furtively on the infant's long white robe. He came home from the office an hour earlier than usual for about ten days in order to see the child, although he was ashamed to own it, and explained, instead, that "business was slack." His early illusions about his wife were galvanized into temporary life when he saw her with the child, and like her he began to dream dreams and see visions. He had been a waif, a stray, nobody's child, dependent actually on public charity for support, forced to make his own way in the world, tossed here and there on the waves of life; but it was different with this child. He should have every chance. He should have a good, sound, practical education. He should be taught to be "a first-rate business man," and not only learn how to take care of the money he would inherit, but to add to it. His name should be good on 'Change for any amount. It was not a name that he liked, for his wife had insisted on calling him Wallace Bertram, but he would indorse it to that extent. "Wallace Bertram?" he had said to her in protest. "Great Scott, Liz, what do you want to call him that for? Where did you get such a highfalutin' name, anyways? I don't know no Wallace, nor no Bertram, neither. I don't like it, neither."

"You should n't say 'no Wallace.' It ain't grammar," replied Mrs. Withers, promptly taking advantage of the side issue to avoid a direct answer.

"You should say 'any Wallace.' It's a splendid name, I think. I saw it in a book, and Bertram, too. I liked them." She did not think it necessary to mention that she had hunted them up in two novels, supposed to be illustrative of high life in England and on the Continent, and had pinned them together, after trying them backwards and forwards to get the most euphonious and effective arrangement possible. She gleaned all that she could from those precious productions in every way, and studied rather than read them. It was much easier work than to study the schoolbooks, which took so much for granted in the way of previous acquirement, and were often so mysterious and always so puzzling. She was not a woman to be easily discouraged. She fairly pored over her copy of "Bullion," and gave it a profound, almost prayerful attention that grammars seldom receive, and that was certainly not properly repaid in this instance, for "Bullion" only churned her mind into a froth of desperation with his rules and regulations and pet constructive hobbies, and the only practical gain was in certain paragraphs scattered here and there, oases in a desert of verbiage for her, intelligible and therefore applicable, — the examples for correction. If they were not wrong they would not need to be corrected, she argued, and recognized many of the familiar sentences with a kind of triumphant disappointment and a little shock of surprise.

It was in this way that she had learned several things, among others the inadvisability, if not the affirmativeness, of a wealth of negatives. It was

only by a great mental effort that she could remember them, the light came so obliquely, and the facts were so dry, hard, so merciless to old habit and destitute of appeal to her imagination. It was different with the novels, with their fascinating revelations about the Duchess of This, and Countess of That, and fashionable life generally. All this seemed to write itself at once on the tablets of her heart in sympathetic ink, and years afterwards she remembered what the Princess Mariana wore at a state ball, and how she had "cast herself on a magnificent *fauteuil*, and tapped the richly embroidered *tapis* with a tiny foot cased in jeweled *bottines* (the gift of the King of Spain)," when things went wrong with that illustrious person, as things will do in the most reckless, democratic fashion with the very greatest people sometimes, and had then "impetuously seized the silver bell that stood on the buhl table at her side and summoned one of her *dames d'honneur*," who was instructed to command the major-domo to order the groom of the chambers to ask the head butler to tell the under footman to send the page of the princess at once, or take the consequences, since "a perfumed missive must reach the palace before midnight." That missive never got to the palace, of course, for an Italian bravo, of a pattern far more diabolical than any Manzoni ever dreamed of, sprang out upon that page in the very next chapter and "wrested" it from his grasp, having previously taken the precaution to cut the bearer's throat, lest the affair should be noised abroad and give rise to unpleasant comment. But it

got to Eureka, and Mrs. Withers bought a quarter's worth of the deadliest musk, and put it in her new box of blue-lined writing paper, not so much in memory of the sad affair, as in preparation for some social emergency that would call for the most elegant epistolary effort.

Mr. Withers's impulse to hover over his son's cradle and interest himself in everything that concerned him was immediately checked by two cross-currents of circumstance that swept him away from the child, not only for the time, but more and more as time went on. One was caused by the fact that his wife had that dominating, managing quality which the French sum up in *maîtresse femme*. She was not content to be a mother only to her children; she wanted and contrived, as far as possible, to be a father, too. There was no room in her nursery for two parents, any more than there is in the Roman Church for two popes. She was at the head of everything, ordered everything, decided everything, and if not infallible was certainly admirable in some respects, systematic, energetic, full of administrative ability. She thought that altogether her own domain, and eliminated her husband from it most successfully without seeming to do so. Under the most favorable conditions it is difficult for a man to be intimate with a baby, — a frail, mysterious, wonderful creature, not to be dealt with on anything like equal terms; of such weak powers as to clamor for constant succor, and such powerful weakness that it can stand out against the whole world; a creature that it is almost dangerous to touch, and

impious to leave alone, who can neither be controlled, nor allowed to have its own way; in short, a bundle of contradictions, possibilities, needs, which, appearing on this planet after a second Deluge and scientifically studied, would show that women — *a* woman certainly — existed, if no faintest tradition of such a being remained or had previously been suspected.

It was not difficult, then, to banish Mr. Withers. He had the best right to be there, but could not maintain his footing. If he smoked, it "choked the baby." If he opened the window, it "gave the baby cold." If he shut the door, it "woke the baby." If he sat down, it was ten chances to one that he was not sitting on the baby. It seemed a risk (for the baby) to breathe the same air. He was sometimes allowed to hold it under surveillance, to play with it under protest. If he had had anything to say, he might have talked to it. That was perfectly safe. But he had n't, although one of the good points of a baby is that it will listen to anything, to the most arrant nonsense, even as if it were the wisdom of Solomon, and does n't any more care how often the subject is changed than if it were a dictionary. But always a reserved man, Mr. Withers could not hit upon a subject that seemed suited to the comprehension of his son, and perhaps he was too generous to avail himself of a capacity for infinite absorption that may be attended with infinite suffering, for all we know. It is certain that he never got farther than to stump along in a one-legged conversational way, for a moment or two, to supplement the deficiencies of which he was

fully aware with a pat on the child's head, or a chuck of its double chin. He would then relapse into a few brief and serious comments upon its appearance or growth, and go below, leaving his wife officer of the deck, to sail the strange little craft across the oceans of infancy and eternity.

It was not only that he felt himself the fifth wheel of the coach and very much in the way, there were other demands upon his time. These, indeed, were growing more serious every day, as his business developed and extended itself into fresh fields of speculation and profit. He was digging deep and laying well the foundation of his fortune, and that not so much of conscious purpose as in unconscious play of faculty. He felt that he was in his element. He thoroughly enjoyed making money. The exercise of his peculiar gifts, the sense of power, were delightful to him, — the greatest gratification that he knew. And then the ease of it! It seemed to him a far more remarkable thing not to make money. The stupidity, timidity, credulity, the want of insight of other men's business methods, with their resultant failure and disaster, often amazed him. It was like breathing to him: given lungs and oxygen, and what else should follow? And it was almost an impossibility for him to do anything else, so perfectly was he fitted for it, so well did he know when to be bold and when to be cautious, when to risk all and when to risk nothing, when to have the largest faith or show the profoundest skepticism, — so unerring was the instinct of commercial diagnosis by which he discerned the fatal flaw in any scheme

set before him, however veiled from ordinary eyes, and saw its inevitable outcome, however distant. If the Sisters had kept him under their white wings, and had made it their one object to carry out his father's views with regard to his education, they could not have better succeeded, for if he did not "bet on the winnin' horse," he had mounted it, and was already in full gallop toward — the judge's stand.

The good angel that waits so patiently behind the screen of our flesh upon the moods of men, and contrives to say a word now and then to the busiest, laid a gently detaining hand upon Mr. Withers's arm sometimes in the rush and whirl of his life, and reminded him that he had other duties to his family than those of cashier and commissary-general. Could he not contrive to spend a little more time at home? Ought he not to see more of his children? There were three of them now, — noisy little creatures, twittering away under the eaves of his house like so many swallows; and one of them appealed to him very powerfully, — his little daughter, his little Mary come again, as he felt. The eldest daughter had been christened Matilda, under a fashionable necessity which Mrs. Withers regretted but obeyed, for had she not met "East" the summer before a lady credibly reported to be "in the best society," and had she not carefully cultivated quite an intimacy with her, and written to her with every precaution in the way of spelling and construction that could be suggested by her schoolbooks and a new "Complete Letter-Writer" that she had seen

advertised and bought? What so likely to promote greater intimacy as the delicate compliment she had in mind? So after hesitating a little, Mrs. Withers had named the child Matilda rather than Annabel, which but for distinguished associations would have been preferred. An unlucky choice, for it really pleased no one. The lady in question was not a lady, although Mrs. Withers had taken her for one, and took no notice of the letter in which the fact was conveyed, except to drop Mrs. Withers altogether, a course that cruelly mortified her, and made her furious secretly. She had no one to whom she could pour out her anger and disappointment, but she brooded over it a great deal in secret, and learned from it her first great lesson in a certain science, the alpha of the worldly alphabet which she had set herself to master, — "Thou shalt not trust thy neighbor." She had counted on several things, advantages that would flow out of the new relation. The great lady would be godmother of course to the little Matilda, would send handsome gifts to her namesake, would ask mother and child to visit her, would help her to get into that mysterious "best society" of all her dreams.

It was the first apple of Sodom that she had tasted, thinking only of the golden fruit of Hesperides, and it almost choked her; but, with characteristic persistence, she added to the now hated Matilda the name of the next greatest lady of her acquaintance, that of Mrs. Snodgrass, of Snodgrass & Blodgett, and then, having soothed her wounded pride, vented her maternal vanity and affection in a nick-

name, and called the child "Queenie." She raged inwardly over the whole matter, but said nothing of it to her husband, who had opposed the scheme, and had as usual been overruled. It had the effect, however, of making her more willing to give in to his views when, three years later, another daughter was born to them. "If you 've no objections, Liz, *I* would like to name this here one," he had said to her, and on her conceding the point, had said, after a pause, "I 'm going to call her Mary;" and had then kissed the child twice, and still holding it in his arms, had kissed her, and then had again kissed the child, after which he laid it down and walked out of the house, leaving her greatly surprised. Four kisses in one day! What had come to him? And why "Mary"? She would cross-question him about it, she thought. It was significant of the want of confidence between them that he had no impulse to tell her anything of his past, much less of that tender memory; and when she asked, apropos of nothing, at dinner that day, whether his mother's name was Mary, and, getting a negative, asked further if he had ever known any woman named Mary, he contented himself with the simple repetition of what she had said, with a difference. No, he had never known a woman of that name.

From that day forward the thought of the children was oftener with him, but there was no change in his habits. The thought of his little Polly especially (as he called his Mary, after all) was very sweet to him, but there seemed only the greater necessity for "getting on," when he came to think of

it. Now was the time, while they were young, to accumulate for them. They would have to be educated, and handsomely provided for, — the girls, at least; the boy he had determined should "paddle his own canoe," after he had "got his schoolin'." And they were so young, he argued. After a while, when they were larger and more companionable, he would see a great deal of them, and teach them all he could. He really would. He would have more leisure by that time to give to them, and they would be at an age to profit by the association. They were better left in their mother's hands at present. What a smart woman she was, and how nice she kept them, and what pretty clothes she made them!

The children had only intensified, not altered, the character of the ambition of either parent.

At the close of the sixth year of their life in Eureka, Mr. Withers, who had been feeling for some time that the place was too small for him, made up his mind to move to Denton. "When you are ready, Liz, we 'll just pull up stakes and get out of this little one-horse town," he said to his wife. "I 'm getting sorter tired of its Jim Crow ways. I 've got the biggest business in it, but that ain't saying much. I can operate on a bigger scale in Denton. What do you say to living there?"

Mrs. Withers listened with brightening eyes and flushed cheeks, but was not surprised. It was a step in the right direction, she thought, and if she had a good deal to say on the subject, it was not because she had any objection to making the change in question. She promptly turned the situation to

account, in order to carry out a plan of her own. She had seen an entire panorama in a flash of feminine inspiration while he spoke, and had her arguments ready and her heaviest siege guns trailed before he had finished. She at once proceeded to set before him several things. She belonged to that not uncommon class of wives that take a leaf out of Dick Turpin's book, who, when he took the road, always had his horses' shoes reversed that he might seem to be going in some other direction than the one he really took. So now she affected to be very seriously inconvenienced by her husband's determination. She was comfortably settled, she said, and she hated moving, but still if it was to his interest — To which he replied that as to comfort, she should have a nicer house than the one she was living in, if it was to be had.

Whereupon Mrs. Withers said that as they were breaking up, she might as well take advantage of the fact to go East for the summer, not on her own account at all, but because it would "do the children so much good, — Mary especially, who was very delicate." And if he was selling the house, there was a good deal of "rubbishing stuff" about the place that it would be well to get rid of, — old things that were useless. Their valuables could be stored; she would see to all that. As for the new house, she would "fix that up first-rate" when she returned, and would pick up a few little things East to make it look pretty, — a pair of muslin curtains and a fender and a footstool, — that is, if she remembered them. She spoke quite pathetically of

what it cost her to break up her home, and to exile herself from Eureka and her husband, and then retired from all further discussion of their plans for that day. Mr. Withers's attitude had been one of unexpressed opposition throughout, but he had not committed himself. It was his custom to slowly revolve in his mind and gradually digest the fluent speeches of his wife. They afforded him matter for a good deal of reflection. He sat for some time now in his armchair in front of the fire, pulling away at a single hair growing out of a mole under his chin, as he had a trick of doing when absorbed in thought. His constitutional reserve stood him in good stead with his wife. She never could tell exactly how far she had succeeded or failed in her attempts to medicate his mind.

When he had gone to town, she gave way to her secret exhilaration. Another link in the golden chain was made! She was going into a handsomer house in a larger town! She would leave the children in St. Louis with her Aunt Packer. No, she would n't; Aunt Packer was not the style of relative that she meant to have for the future; but she would settle them somewhere, and "travel round" a bit and see and learn all she could, and, above all, furnish in New York her new house. It should be the handsomest in Denton, only she must not let "Mr. Withers," as she now called her husband, suspect it. She made long lists of things she meant to buy, and congratulated herself on having managed so well.

After having passed in mental review all her

present belongings, — furniture, china, silver, dresses, — and decided whether they were likely to grace the Denton establishment, Mrs. Withers was settling down to a piece of embroidery, in a black alpaca gown as comfortable as her rocking-chair (sole relic of former days, a clumsily honest wooden structure with a hide bottom, not discarded because it was "the only chair she could sew in," but dragged hastily out of sight when "company" came), when an idea struck her. A good big idea this: it was a piano, or as she would have said, a "pianner." She must have a piano. Not that she could play on it, but because it would "look so well." How should she get it? She decided the question in a moment. When Mr. Withers came home to dinner that day, he was met by a smiling wife looking her best, arrayed in her most becoming dress, and naturally so impatient to welcome her dear husband that she had run down to the gate to meet him the moment she heard the wheels of his buggy. She had little Mary in her arms, and, seeing the pair, Mr. Withers smiled, well pleased, and held out his arms to the child, who tumbled forward into them in the spontaneous, unreserved fashion that was one of her greatest charms.

Mary was a baby that owed everything physically to her fair skin and her long-lashed large blue eyes; but if her features had been even more insignificant, and she had been as brown as a berry, she would have been charming still, she was so full of small endearments, coquetries, bewitchments, so ready to kiss everybody and go to anybody. She perfectly

understood that she had a slave in her father, and as she was borne back to the house, amused herself by alternately giving him various slaps about the face and tugs of the beard (which made him blink a good deal and laugh a little), with sudden kisses from a rosy, wet mouth, that contrived to give out a loud "smack," and then stretched away into a mouth three times its original size, turned up at the corners, revealing two small white teeth set prominently and roguishly in the centre of the laugh. Mrs. Withers got out her handkerchief and flipped the dust from her husband's coat as they went, talking the while, but not of pianos; and he listened, and replied as well as he could for holding Mary's hands in his own brown, large grasp, and attending generally to that young person, who was very diverting in more senses than one, and was making the liveliest sort of play with her knees and heels against his chest. There was a quiet little time after they got to the house, during which Mary slipped on and off her father's knee as though she were buttered, and played all over him and around him, but lambently, and Mrs. Withers's talk was all of the "children," but particularly of Mary. The dinner-bell came, and Mary, who was rushing across the room apparently with the fixed intention of knocking the door down, was seized and carried struggling upstairs by her father, roaring lustily, her legs and arms revolving as if she were a windmill.

All during dinner Mrs. Withers made herself very agreeable, but did not touch upon musical instruments of any kind. And after dinner, when

Mr. Withers was smoking and reading the newspaper, his wife drew a chair near him and said nothing for some time, but did not fail to cross a pair of pretty feet on a chair under his very nose. Looking around presently, he smiled to see them there. If there was a thing that he admired about his wife, it was her foot. Mrs. Withers noticed the smile, and smiled herself — in her sleeve. The next time Mr. Withers looked that way, she shifted the position of the feet somewhat, and left them to do their work. After a bit Mr. Withers took another look, and remarked, "Those are nice shoes, Liz. Where did you get 'em?" Upon which a friendly little conversation sprang up, with a great deal of animation and warmth in it on the part of the wife, and quiet, contented commonplace on that of the husband. Mrs. Withers, with artless art, introduced her piano into it a leg at a time, as it were. Her husband was of the opinion, while it was still in the hall disguised as a glittering generality, pianos in general, that "pianners" were "all foolishness." "Give him a music-box," said he, "when he wanted that sort of noise, which was n't often." And even when, after circling around in vague comment and abstract propositions for some moments, Mrs. Withers dropped into the centre of her web, like the spider that she was, and declared herself, he insisted for a time that he "would n't have such a thing in the house." What did she want with it? It would be no use to her. To which she replied: "I can pick out a chune or two, Presh, for the children; and then they will

be coming on soon, and I want 'em to learn to play real well. The younger they begin, the finer they play. And Mary 's got a splendid ear; I can see she has. She can turn a chune now." Little by little Mr. Withers was converted from frowning disapproval to acquiescence, and finding him in a yielding mood, Mrs. Withers broached another matter. She felt it to be a risk after such a decided concession, and she sat for some time quiet, repressing the exultation she felt, and leaving her husband to chew in fancy the cud offered in her last speech to him, — "Mary will be playing splendid for her pa in a few years, I 'm just shore." Then she said, "I want to give a party before we break up here, darling hubby."

"A *party!* What sorter party?" exclaimed Mr. Withers, alarmed at once and remonstrant.

"Why, an evening party," replied his wife boldly.

"Great Scott, Lizbeth! what on the face of the earth do you want to go turning the house upside down and inside out fur, like that? And do you know what it will cost? I don't see as you 've got any call to put yourself out fur none of 'em. You don't owe 'em nothing," said Mr. Withers, making quite a long speech, so great was his discontent. "*I've* never darkened the door of any of 'em excepting onst. I did go to Mr. Briggs's one evening before we were married." He spoke as he felt, with much virtuous emotion and much unspoken reprobation of such frivolous things as social gatherings of every kind. And his words had all the weight of a reproof, for this was living up to the

Eurekan ideal perfectly. A business man or a husband, unlike "the girls," was to have neither evenings nor afternoons out, and a man who was both was supposed to be dead to any temptation to do so, or, feeling such, lost if he yielded to it. Mrs. Pierce, wife of Judge Pierce, made it her boast that *her* husband had not "eat a meal of victuals outside of his own house for forty years," and called upon all Eureka to match her that for domestic integrity. And though there were weak souls in the community that fell short of this standard, they had the grace to assume the same degree of virtue though they had it not; and if they were not ashamed of drinking bad whiskey and gambling and various other refined pleasures, as long as they were not found out, they at least were careful to keep up the solemn farce that they never needed to amuse themselves, and so helped to keep the local superstition and fiction alive.

So now Mrs. Withers, with real respect, hastened to say apologetically: "I know, I know you have n't. But just let me ask a few that has been polite to me," and Mr. Withers, agreeably conscious of being exonerated from all suspicion of conviviality, consented to allow the party to be given.

It was given. All Eureka was asked, and, in spite of its principles, nearly all Eureka went, so great already was the prestige of Mrs. Withers's entertainments. Mrs. Withers ordered a good supper. Mr. Withers forbade her to have wine. The affair was described afterwards somewhat vaguely as "fairy-land," the house as "Paradise," the host-

ess as "a regal beauty," and the host as "Colonel Withers, one of our most distinguished citizens," in the "Eureka Star." Mrs. Withers and the children left for the East next day, and Mr. Withers, going down to the cellar a few days later for something, found five dozen empty champagne bottles piled up there, and understood why his wife had been so anxious that he should go into a back room about supper-time, and "have a good smoke" with certain of his particular friends, or rather men that she chose to regard as such.

"H'm! She *is* a smart woman, sure and certain," he reflected, "Liz is. She got ahead of me on this." He sat down on the steps and looked about him, not very cheerfully. "I wish — I wish she war n't so. Why can't she be open and aboveboard? Yes, she gets ahead of me every time. She 's going to operate on a bigger scale, too, in Denton. She 's going to splurge whenever she gets the chance. She 'd be welcome to, if — Well, I reckon I 'd better be going to the orfus. I wish she had n't of taken Polly with her."

CHAPTER IV

Autumn came, and with it the return of Mrs. Withers and the children to the West. They were all blooming naturally, or artificially; all very fashionably appareled; all somewhat changed, as such travelers are apt to appear to home-staying eyes. Mrs. Withers was in a state of brilliant good humor, and entire if secret satisfaction. She was handsomer than ever, as her husband instantly perceived. And she precipitated herself into his arms with a warmth and abandon that could not but be gratifying under the circumstances, but which more suspiciously interpreted would have given him some idea of the costliness of her affection. But Mr. Withers was not suspicious — or only latently so.

Away from his wife he was able to form judgments and draw conclusions that were anything but flattering to her. But when he was with her, it was different. When she chose to do so, she could make him think as she thought and believe what she wished him to believe (for the time), so great was the influence of her strong will, her readiness, vivacity, fluent mendacity, upon his reserved nature. So now he found himself agreeably stirred by her cajoleries, and allowed himself to be kissed and praised and flattered, not only without remonstrance, but with pleasure, a pleasure that deepened into delight when little Mary was again nestling in his arms.

"Ain't she looking splendid, Presh? Got all her teeth that she 's going to have right now elegant, — no trouble with her at all. She was n't sick a day. Stop eating that apple and kiss your dear popper" (to Mary, who, honestly weaned from her father by her long absence, had only suffered herself to be embraced, and then become sincerely absorbed in something that did interest her). "And just look at Wallace and Queenie! It was dreadful staying away so long, but I thought I might never be East again, and I might as well do what I could in the way of looking 'round for schools for the children; and the doctor said it would n't do to travel with Mary. You are looking just splendid, hubby; I declare to gracious you ain't the man I married at all — you are so real good-looking now, and spruced up in your Sunday-go-to-meeting coat, too!" babbled Mrs. Withers, and thought, "I 'll give that coat away to-morrow. He ain't dressed as good as the waiters at the hotel in New York."

"You are looking well yourself, Liz — first-rate," he replied. "Never saw you look better. That there dress of yours, now, is what *I* call a pretty dress — so neat. How did you leave your Aunt Packer?"

"Oh, she 's much better than she was in the spring. She blubbered right out when she come in and found me there, and you never saw such a fuss as she made over the children in all your born days," replied Mrs. Withers. She then proceeded to give an interesting account of how she had taken her babes to her only near relative and made her

boast, and to give exact and affecting details of the whole visit to her "second mother."

When Mrs. Withers told a story in letters three, she liked it to be a good big one that could take care of itself, and not always be coming back to her for alterations and repairs; she liked it to be bold, and she also liked it to be beautiful. She had not been in St. Louis at all; she had not seen her Aunt Packer, that excellent milliner and woman whose apprentice she had been, — a simple, mild old soul, of many homespun virtues and one humble boast, that she was "a Bible Xtian."

A Christian Aunt Packer certainly was; and finding it doubly written in her heart and what she was wont to call "The Book" that "the fatherless" had a claim upon her, she had taken not only Mrs. Withers "to raise" (when she was a barefooted, gingham-aproned, frowzy child of seven), but another person in whom she recognized "the widow in her affliction," with a fine spiritual vision such as is sometimes found behind horn spectacles in tear-dimmed eyes; and that without any difficulty such as obliges metaphysicians to bring out the mystical nature of texts to which unpleasant responsibilities are attached, and speculate nicely about verbal inspiration. In short, good Aunt Packer, with little enough for herself, had shared it with the wife and child of a disreputable brother whom she had loved, and could very well have borne to have lost, if he had only been a better man, — a brother rarely mislaid, however, for any length of time until he shipped as boatswain on a ship bound for Trieste from New

York, and disappeared one night in a dense fog for good and all.

It is true his widow was not long afflicted. In six months she married a handsome Irish recruiting sergeant, who was glib of tongue and was enlisting a good many people of both sexes under his banner and that of the United States, and soon after went out to Santa Fé, leaving Aunt Packer in undisturbed possession of the sole daughter of her house and heart. There Elizabeth stayed, and learned her aunt's ways, and in time her aunt's trade, and got prettier every year, and knew it, and got discontented and ever more discontented. She longed for a grand house, and bit her lips when her aunt talked of "the house not made with hands;" pined for fine clothes, and snappishly declined the proffered ornament of "a meek and quiet spirit;" worked hard, and put all she could get into trinkets and other feminine fal-lals; and finally, hearing from some friend that there was an "opening" in Eureka, made it an excuse for securing the adventure and liberty that she had long coveted. Poor old Aunt Packer had been left to hold that metaphorical bag into which she had put all her hard earnings — a small sum, easily reckoned — and much labor and more love. It seemed to her that there was a grievous hole in the bottom, and that everything had slipped through it; but in this she was mistaken, or if it had, it was only into that Privy Purse of which George Herbert wrote, "whose contents he gave to his Creator, who alone knew what it contained."

In the first year of her marriage Mrs. Withers had written occasionally to the aunt she had defied and abandoned, — brief letters, in a blotched, cramped text, taken up almost entirely with herself and her own affairs, asking very earnestly about the fashions, and generally for patterns of this or that garment. Not letters one would have supposed to be prized and wept over and read to neighbors and treasured afterwards, yet so regarded and treated by Aunt Packer, for the simple reason that the loving are always the forgiving and injured people never implacable. And Mrs. Withers had heard from her also, occasionally, that worthy woman being no more of a scribe than a Pharisee, and not feeling it necessary to write without due necessity, after the manner of people of her class.

But Mrs. Withers soon lost interest in these carefully wrought, infrequent productions, with their accounts of the life in "the store" which she already knew so well, and always disliked, and was now ashamed of: their queer mixture of millinery and millennial aspiration, the greatest interest and greatest hopes of the writer; their unconscious, uncomfortable appeals to the Elizabeth Thompson that ought to have been. From her mother she never heard at all, and she was by no means overwhelmed by grief when the news came that she had died out in New Mexico, and so did not need the consolation that her Aunt Packer got from the fact that she had "gone to a better country," which she might easily have done without taking such a decided step. One of the most urgent reasons that Mrs. Withers had

pressed upon her husband for going East had been that "Aunt Packer was getting very old and wanted to see her;" and listening to her account of that (imaginary) pilgrimage, Mr. Withers got the assurance that he needed on a certain point.

"It was a good trait in Liz that she should be so fond of her aunt, and had been anxious to gratify her. And as for the five hundred dollars that she had given her out of the money he had sent, it was a good deal, but still the interest on it would n't amount to anything, and once in a way" — So thinking, he thawed out a good deal to his wife, and told her that there were two houses in Denton for sale; that she could have her "pick;" and that she could either stay where she was in the hotel for the winter, or move in at once.

Should he have their effects sent over from Eureka or not? To all this Mrs. Withers replied that she would "see about all that," and he need give himself no trouble about it; she knew what to do exactly. What she did was to go over to Eureka and sell off all her household possessions, and forward the money as a sort of sop to Cerberus, namely, to certain merchants in New York. She returned to Denton, selected the handsomer of the two houses offered her, had a large room added on one side on the pretense of "throwing out a bow-window," such as she had seen and admired in her late travels, and received, unpacked, and disposed of cartload after cartload that came by every wagon-train for weeks, addressed to "Mrs. Colonel Withers:" cases, boxes, barrels, containing, she told her husband, "a few things that she was obliged to have."

She was all explanations for a time, and proved conclusively that her old carpets would not fit the new rooms, nor the old furniture match the new carpets, and that everything in the Eurekan establishment had been soiled, spoiled, broken, cracked, faded, — in short, was worthless. Whether Mr. Withers believed in the existence of the necessity his wife was under to refurnish throughout was of small moment to her. She had, as she reflected, with many a throb of pride and self-congratulation, "the things." She had selected them herself with the most religious care, taking pains to get them as much like those she saw about her in the hotel where she had stayed as possible. She could imagine nothing more elegant or luxurious, and had studied every detail of the inimitable whole with a view to reproducing it on a modest scale.

So it was easy for her to get a good deal of the desired effect when she set to work diligently to fix the fleeting impressions she had received, and execute the plans she had made. When she had put down in her big parlor the new carpet, which had enough design for twenty floors and would have required at least two rooms to give any idea of the pattern; when she had furnished the apartment in red satin, papered its walls in green, hung three huge mirrors that reflected faithfully the gaudy bareness of the place, she proceeded to give the lighter touches of the original. She placed on her marble centre-table, now, an immense silver affair which had been sold to her as a "waiter," but which she preferred to designate as a "salver," and crowned it with a

large silver "ice pitcher" and a silver "mug." She radiated newly acquired knowledge in fifty directions. She put a sweet copy of N. P. Willis's poems, and Tupper's complete works, and the Waverley Novels, and Shakespeare (in red and gold) about the room. Four huge marble funeral urns adorned the corners, that would have held the ashes of all the Dentonians properly cremated. She set off the marble shelf prodigiously with a gilt clock, two flowered china vases that flared out into a semicircle of convolutions, and added a canton-flannel rabbit of a species unknown to naturalists, placed equidistant from a box studded with shells and relieved with bits of looking-glass.

She mounted engravings of Napoleon signing the Treaty of Tilsit and General Washington taking his Farewell of the Army in very choice frames of pine burrs brilliantly varnished. She filled the fireplace with dried grasses, and stationed a large papier-maché dog in front of it to guard the sacred flame that was metaphorically there. An actual fire was never lit in this state apartment. The chairs were ranged around the room at regular intervals, the outside shutters closed, and the shrine was complete, down to a large bouquet of artificial flowers springing out of a basket, itself all flowers, — roses, pinks, morning-glories, and chrysanthemums in Berlin wool and high relief. Not content with this, she hung quantities of elaborately cut, gayly colored tissue paper ornaments from the ceiling of her dining-room, and treated that whole floor in the same spirit of faithful imitation; so much so, that

ringing a bell in any one of the rooms, one would have expected to hear a voice in some remote region call out, "Pitcher of water for 36," or "Mint-juleps for 24 — stiff."

It was a peerless, flawless model house to Mrs. Withers, though, when it was finished, and she took her husband all over it, pointing out the most elegant and striking features. He stumbled over two chairs and a footstool at the door of the parlor, and asked if it was n't kept "a leetle too dark," but that was his only bit of adverse criticism, except that he would n't "set" in it habitually "for any money; it was too fine; he would n't dare turn round in it." He thought it so grand that he was glad to fly from its chill splendor, after treading respectfully in the wake of his wife, inspecting everything that she bade him notice, from her new gilt card-tray to the piano, which she had ceased to call a "pianner," having learned her mistake from the clerk who sold it to her, and altered her pronunciation with characteristic quickness. She strummed a little on it, and closed and locked it before she left the room, putting the key in one of the vases on the mantel-shelf, where it stayed, except on the very rare occasions when she entertained. Like the Shakespeare, the leaves of which remained uncut for years, it was a stage property. It was opened officially when she gave her housewarming, and she went about among her guests looking, as she frankly stated, for some one who could "show it off," stating at the same time that she had "given up her music," but meant to have her children taught "all the modern accomplishments" as soon as they were old enough.

The Dentonians had not been slow to call upon the newcomers, and all the air had been filled with rumors of the splendor of "Mrs. Withers's house." All that it contained was spoken of as if it were the sole property of Mrs. Withers, and Mr. Withers had absolutely no interest in it. The very children were "Mrs. Withers's children," and "Mrs. Withers's housewarming" created a pretty stir in the community when it came. The invitations for it were issued in her name alone, and anything so *recherché* as the gilt-edged paper on which they were written, with its moss-roses, and harps, and children's heads, and hands clasped in friendship's closest grasp, and other beautiful emblems, had never been seen before in the town.

They were unanimously dubbed "elegant," and handed about quite extensively for admiring inspection. Public opinion was more divided about a sentence that appeared in the right-hand corner of each note after the guests had been formally bidden to the entertainment. It was a bold departure from recognized forms which was startling. To depart from established usage showed either great nerve, or the security of conscious superiority. Was "Strawberries and Fun" a phrase to be ridiculed and condemned as "perfectly absurd and unheard of," or was it a damaging admission to make, when it might appear, later, that Mrs. Withers was only following the most fashionable precedent? Denton could not make up its mind on this point, and wisely decided to reserve its judgment.

It had taken Mrs. Withers so long to settle into

the new house that strawberry-tide had really come before she was ready to invite the admiration and challenge the criticism of her neighbors. "All fixed for company," she phrased it. When that time came, she was as anxious to be seen as they were to know what she had been about. It was she who not only inspired, but assisted in, all the arrangements for the entertainment, although she had two servants now, — which was thought a large staff of domestics in Denton. She had had only one in Eureka, and that one had been known as a "help," and had taken her meals with the family, and been quite as much of a friend as a factotum; but Mrs. Withers had instituted a different system lately, and drawn the lines between mistress and maid most rigidly. If she concerned herself in the preparations for the approaching feast, and went about for a week beforehand in a *déshabille* more suited to the rank of the latter than the former, it was only because she would trust no one to give certain elegant effects that she had set her heart upon producing.

When the house was in full gala dress, the parlor opened and lighted as brilliantly as lamps and candles could shine; when the bedrooms had been put in a state of knitted counterpane and pillow-"sham" propriety that was perfectly abnormal, unnatural, and awful, in expectation of the arrival of the ladies; when a pocket-comb had been thoughtfully placed on the hat-rack in the hall below for the use of the gentlemen, and every trace of every-day life and occupation had been swept away, Mrs. Withers

felt that the decks were cleared for action, and retired to the dining-room. There was not much to be done there. The supper-table was set off with quantities of artificial flowers, plated candlesticks, silver cake-baskets; the dishes with heaven-knows-what other inventions and adaptations of Mrs. Withers's lively fancy in tissue paper and tin foil, turnips and carrots, fennel and parsley, while a noble array of meats, game, salads, jellies, ices, cakes, and creams, biscuits, wafers, and doughnuts had been placed against this cheerful but unsubstantial background. Mrs. Withers regarded it with entire satisfaction, stood a moment taxing her memory to recall "how things were done East," altered one or two things in the arrangement of the table, dropped into each plate a card on which was written the name of a guest, and flushed, triumphant, retired to her room.

Not long after, the bare-legged, limp-skirted children (who had been keeping the flies off the cakes on the back gallery for two days, and still lingered in their unutterably fascinating vicinage), peeping in at the parlor windows, saw Mrs. Withers, gorgeously attired, enter the door and take up her position near it. They saw her draw on her white kids, and settle three bracelets on each arm. They saw Master Wallace Bertram Withers and Miss Queenie Withers and Miss Mary Withers, all frills and ribbons and flounces, join her, — the Dentonian idea of an entertainment being the inclusive rather than exclusive one, and embracing everybody from the cradle to the grave. Mr. Withers looked in

presently, rather sternly, and went on upstairs. A mere glance, but he had seen in his wife's ears a pair of solitaire diamonds. He had in his pocket a letter from Aunt Packer, saying that "not hearing from her dear Lizzie for eighteen months, she had grown very uneasy, and consequently wrote to him." "That is where it went," thought Mr. Withers, as he gloomily struggled into his black alpaca coat, and tied the red cravat which was to give a markedly festive air to his toilet, — "that is where that five hundred went! Diamonds! She never went near her aunt!" He felt outraged and indignant, rather than disappointed. He would tell her to-morrow what he thought of her conduct. He would not spare her at all. He would say something to-night. But when he got downstairs, he found that was not so easily done, for guests had begun to arrive.

All Denton came, and enjoyed itself, and went home to report that the affair was the "handsomest set-out" that had ever been given there, and to pronounce Mrs. Withers's house "a splendid mansion," and Mrs. Withers herself "extremely genteel." There was as much said about gentility in Denton as about respectability in an almshouse, and for much the same reason. There were a few people — captious souls — who thought it a work of supererogation for Mrs. Withers to wear her rings outside her gloves, and had something to say about a large tin coffee-pot which was brought in during supper, and smoked invitingly on a side-table (to the great comfort of certain old gentlemen, who helped themselves freely to its contents, and disposed of cup

after cup, or rather saucer after saucer, at almost boiling point) ; there was a whisper that Mr. Withers had " bitten a piece clear out of one of Mrs. Withers's new tumblers," which was thinner than those to which he was used. But this is an envious world, and we all know it, and all this was very properly set down to malice and uncharitableness.

The general verdict was that Denton was honored in having such citizens, and Mr. Blodgett, being praised very much for having influenced them to leave " that horrid Eureka" and settle in the " genteel Denton," confided to every other person that he met that " Withers was wuth a million, if he was wuth a red cent." And Mrs. Snodgrass, who had patronized Mrs. Withers extensively up to that period, announced everywhere that Mrs. Withers's eldest girl was named for her; that Mrs. Withers was " one of the dearest friends that she had in the world." She was quite the dearest that Mr. Withers had, as he found when he came to pay the New York bills, — as he did, without remonstrance this time. He had found, too, that it was one thing to tell your wife what you think of her when she is absent, and you can express yourself in your own mind without the least restraint, can arrange the dialogue in such a way that all your arguments are perfectly convincing and unanswerable, and she does not open her lips except to confess her faults or beg your forgiveness, and quite another thing to do so when she is very much present and far from being either dumb or submissive.

Mrs. Withers noticed the constraint of manner

and increased reserve that marked his knowledge of what had happened, but set it down to his chagrin at having to pay the piper, and so went her way, unreproved, and unconscious that she was detected. Her husband's idea was that she would not be content to live quietly in her handsome house, but would be constantly entertaining, or wanting to entertain. But he was quite mistaken in this. When she had shown, as she supposed, that she "knew how to entertain," she relapsed into a life that had all the monotony of domesticity, with none of its charms. The house, viewed from the front, seemed to be hermetically sealed the year round. There were no faces at the windows, no flowers about it, no music, no lights. One rarely saw any one go into or come out of it, and it might have been thought a deserted house but for the brilliant cleanliness and perfect order of its stolid, solid façade, the specklessness of its white marble steps, the glitter of the window-panes on the second floor when a shutter was carelessly left unclosed, and the unmistakable proof that it was inhabited furnished by the family linen as displayed on Monday and Tuesday of every week in the garden behind it.

Mrs. Withers was a born housewife, and within there was the same neatness, with happily a little more cheerfulness. But she was too new to her possessions to be on comfortable terms with them, and made a sort of religion of her household duties, — a religion of strict rules and any number of petty ordinances, of much gloom and some mystery, with herself for high priestess, "the best things" for

sacred vessels, and the family for victims. The whole establishment was kept in a state of drill-sergeant, Sunday-morning-inspection, spick-and-spanness. It was the business of Mrs. Withers's life to see that nothing was injured or disturbed. Her husband on coming home from the office habitually entered the grounds by a side gate, and let himself into the house by the back door, partially out of respect to the domestic convenience which made any other entry a serious matter, involving a great amount of care as to whether his boots had been properly cleaned, whether the carpets would be muddied, and the impossibility of disposing satisfactorily of a wet umbrella, and partly because he preferred the more homely arrangement. The back premises were the only part of the establishment in which he felt at home. There he sat and smoked, unrebuked, with his coat off. There he romped with the children when he was not too tired. And there he liked to sit in fine weather over his newspaper and speculate about this or that transaction, his pencil stuck behind his ear the while, and his memorandum-book at hand; or minus that, and plus a sudden inspiration, his cuffs to fall back upon, which he would draw down and cover with rows and rows of figures, elaborate calculations that often astonished his laundress, who could make nothing of them.

For the next seven years his brain was a blackboard, and with a bit of white chalk he was eagerly jotting down or expunging sums invested, expended, gained, in a passionate absorption that combined the

disciplined frenzy of the gamester with the patience of a coolie. A series of apparent "flukes," really the result of rare insight, had given him command of large capital, and capital was all that he needed. Every other qualification for phenomenal success he possessed already in the highest degree, and having that, soon showed what he was. The skill with which he avoided doubtful issues and movements was only equaled by his nerve in clinging to apparently hopeless but really valuable ones, and his boldness in risking large sums where other men would have feared to give the smallest. And if he had pluck, he certainly had luck as well, for somehow all his ships sailed on prosperous seas and got safely into port, and for him to venture was to have.

His reputation as a business man grew apace, and his career was followed by that curious personal satisfaction that human nature generally accords to all forms of success, expressed variously in admiration, imitation, flattery, subservience, according to the nature of the individual. We can't all make a million, but we all goggle respectfully at the man who can, our feeling being that it must be a remarkable thing, indeed, that we can't do. Mr. Withers could no more have sketched a landscape, or caught a strain of music, or written a verse of poetry, or made an eloquent speech, than he could have danced the minuet; yet men of ability in every profession already admired and envied him as if he were an Admirable Crichton or Bayard, a hero or a sage.

It was not wonderful, then, that the commercial class soon began to regard him with positive venera-

tion. It was well known that he was multiplying his millions, that the New York papers spoke of him "as a Western magnate" and "a financial genius." Mr. Blodgett now credited him with at least five times his actual fortune. People said that "Withers had taken hold of so and so, and that it was as good an investment as there was;" that "Withers had predicted the failure of something else a year before the crash came." Lazy merchants descanted on his "good luck;" industrious ones were sure that he owed everything to his boundless energy; enthusiastic ones liked to slap him on the back and tell him what a "shrewd," "long-headed," "deep," "wonderful" fellow he was; unfortunate ones wanted to be towed in the phosphorescent wake of this great "invincible." Some there were who tried to avail themselves legitimately of his fortune. There were a great many Germans in Denton, and the president of the Saengerbund and Schuetzenfest Union called upon Mr. Withers one day and asked him to subscribe to their fund for building a Casino.

"It vill be shplendid," said he. "Ve vill have music, — blay und sing. Ach! Mozart, Bach, Beethoven! Not vot de Americans calls music. Tvice in de veek Schneider vill read Goethe, Klopstock, Richter, Heine, und udders. Vonce a mont ve haf de Casino turned to theatre und blay Schiller. Und always coot pier! Ver' coot pier. Come! shmoke a bipe mid us. You vill enjoy yourselves. Yah!" But this attractive programme had no charms for Mr. Withers, who not only declined to take part in any of the festivities indicated, but would give no-

thing to their support, to the great disgust of the advocate of the scheme. To his plea that he had not "time" for such frivolities, he "spent his evenings at his orfus," the president opposed himself excitedly, running his hand through his hair from the forehead to the nape of his neck until it presented the appearance of the wildest dishevelment, and glaring, rather than looking at Mr. Withers, sitting with wooden composure before his desk.

"Vyfor?" he demanded, with an indescribable grimace of angry inquiry. "You are den very boor? Beoples sez Vidders is ver' rich man."

"Well, I ain't poor exactly," replied Mr. Withers, with a cool smile.

"Den vyfor do you vork like dot? Vot you vant vid more money? You cannot eat vid two shpoons, Mr. Vidders. You had better don't try. You had more better take your pleasures, und shut down your office und come to de Casino."

"But I don't want to shut my office and go running 'round town fooling away my evenings like that. I don't like it, and I won't do it," asserted Mr. Withers, with a bluntness increased by the fact that he had been interrupted in his work and wanted to get on with it. Had he not wasted a half hour already on this ridiculous, half-crazy Dutchman?

"*You* don't la-ike! you don't la-ike!" repeated the president, in accents of the most withering scorn, rising from his seat to end the interview, his face scarlet with wounded and indignant feeling. "De Reisebilde of Heine, den, is foolishness? De Eurydice of Gluck is foolishness? De Adelaide of

Beethoven is foolishness? Gott in Himmel! Schneider is r-r-right ven he say de Americans vork for deir money like de horse, but know no more to sphend dan de ass!" With this magnificent outburst of Teutonic wrath, which he had emphasized with a blow of his fist on Mr. Withers's desk for each of the gods of his Fatherland, that sent the dust flying about in a visible cloud, Mr. Withers's guest seized his hat and plunged out of the room and into the street beyond.

But it is hardly necessary to say that he had only annoyed not convinced Mr. Withers, who continued to apply himself unremittingly to his business, and to consider it the only occupation worthy of the serious consideration of any sensible man. The men whose opinion he valued, the men of his world, the business world, had nothing but praise for his conduct, he knew, and what should "a ranting foreigner" know about the right course for a dignified, highly successful American banker to pursue! "I doubt whether he is worth twenty thousand dollars, and he has been here ten years," thought he, and contrasting the president's financial condition with his own, came to the conclusion broadly that "that was what came of amusements and Casinos." Mr. Withers could not but be conscious that he was rapidly becoming a personage, and was secretly deeply gratified. He felt himself emphatically "the smith of his own luck." Not that he believed in his luck; he was rather intensely proud of having hammered out with splendid force a golden horseshoe on the common anvil. He perfectly remem-

bered the time when he had not been allowed to so much as warm himself by the forge fire, but had been warned away as a vagrant intruder, knowing all the time that opportunity was all that he lacked.

But if he were not insensible to the praise he received, the laud and honor that in one shape or other came to him every day, he refrained from ridiculous manifestations of complacence. There was no brag about him, no swagger nor bluster. He was not haughty, patronizing, lavish of advice; and if his wife perceived a certain expansion about him, an undercurrent of elation, as it were, it found no expression in words or in his bearing, and escaped the notice of outsiders altogether. He was "not going to make a fool of himself," he thought, and he had enough of the American's keen sense of the ludicrous to keep him from all absurdities; but a desire to wear his honors becomingly sprang up in his heart, — an objection to being considered an "ignoramus" and "a rowdy." He was rich and respected, and he would be richer still and even more respected.

His wife, who had always thought the tone of his mind hopelessly low, was pleasantly surprised when she found that she was "at last beginning to make some impression on Mr. Withers," who did something more than patiently receive various suggestions and rebukes from her, — that is, act on them in a slow fashion very different from her precipitate adoption of everything that commended itself to her. The consciousness that his name and opinions, like

his paper, were "above par," was with him as he tied his cravat in the morning, and made him feel that he was only yielding to a necessity in paying more attention to his dress, and giving larger orders to an obsequious tailor. The fact that his utterances were received as though they were in the highest degree valuable and oracular involved a certain care in choosing the words that were to convey so much wisdom. The more he mixed with his fellows in the wide contact of his commercial relations, the more presentable he became, until he attained to a state of prosperous unremarkableness that might have stood for anything in a country whose males are not conspicuous for personal adornment; and he said the little he had to say with fair regard to the President's American if not the Queen's English.

This period was the happiest he had ever known or was ever to know. A thousand plans for the busy, brilliant future of which he dreamed filled his mind; his energies were as yet equal to any and every demand made upon them; he had the *goût de vie* which makes any life enjoyable, and an especial relish for the life he was leading. His early struggles with adverse fortune had been but a wholesome bitters; his present success might have been represented by a particularly fine quality of sherry, the whole forming an agreeable tonic that was a delicious gratification to the palate, whetting his appetite for the delightful banquet to come. He would have liked to pour out all his plans, aspirations, hopes, to his wife, if she had only been of the

Biblical pattern, the beautiful old pattern that ought never to go out of fashion, with "kindness, meekness, comfort in her tongue; a help, like unto himself, and a pillar of rest." But he knew that he must not do this, unless he was prepared to take all the consequences of his candor, and wisely refrained. What would not Liz do if she knew that he had all that money? What forms would not her pride, social ambition, imperiousness, extravagance, take? The mere thought alarmed him. But he had a companion in his home, if not a *confidante*, to whom he revealed only what he chose, who asked no unpleasant questions, and about whom he had no misgivings, and that was his little daughter Mary.

The time of which he had dreamed and which he had mentally set apart for the purpose, in which he was to see a great deal of his children, had not come yet, — but it was always coming. He got a great many glimpses of them daily, — in bed, at meals, or lessons; waiting in the hall below to go out, perhaps, as he struggled into his own overcoat and hurried off to the office; poring over their books, quarreling over their toys, asleep in their cots. While they were very young, there seemed to be a kind of unpremeditated Box and Cox arrangement which made it difficult to see them at all: they were either so much in the way, or so entirely out of it, when he was at home, that he found it extremely difficult to regulate his intercourse with them satisfactorily, and had looked forward, as we have seen, to the time when they would be older and most

companionable. But now that it had come, he easily persuaded himself that such companionship *for the present* was out of the question. He sometimes wished that he could devote one evening in the week to them, or thought that he did; felt that he would like to stay at home quietly with them on this or that day, take them for a walk, read to them, hear what they had to say at length, cultivate a long-deferred intimacy with them, and gain an intimate knowledge of them, as well as their entire confidence. He often promised himself that he would do all this and much more "some day." But that day had never dawned in any of the years he had spent in Denton.

Like the man of whom it was said that "he did not allow his religion to interfere with his daily life," Mr. Withers took care that his love for his children should not limit his achievements in what he felt to be more practical and important fields of usefulness. He was kind to them all, exercising a large beneficence toward them that spared no outlay of time or trouble that could be given them by other people at his expense, and only shrank from all personal investigation and effort. And one of them, his little "Polly," as he was fond of calling her, he loved with an especial tenderness, owing to a good many causes besides the peculiar relation that had existed between them from the first. For one thing, his wife had made a sort of domestic fetich of her son, whom she had pampered until he was perfectly unbearable even to himself at times, and always so to others.

An unusually handsome boy, it had been his mother's delight to trick him out in fine clothes, the more fantastic the better, to give him his own way in everything, deny him nothing, with the usual result of making him as discontented, ill-tempered, and selfish a child as was ever bred under a régime of foolish indulgence. Not that she saw his faults, shrewd as she was in most matters. She called him her "Prince" and "Beauty," praised, flattered, caressed, but never corrected him. She told people that she had given him "a family name," kept him in an exaggerated Highland costume, with long curls down his back, until he was a great gangling lad in his teens, in order to support this Scotch fiction, and behaved with almost incredible folly in all her dealings with him.

Naturally, he was less adorable in his father's eyes than in his mother's, and the two parents differed continually and radically about him and everything connected with him. Mr. Withers's ideal boy was a boy that was sweeping out somebody's store and sleeping on the counter; "learning some business by hard knocks;" "a sharp boy that could figure out anything, and was up to snuff;" "a boy that could take care of himself and scuffle for himself." Such a boy he was confident would "amount to something," and Master Wallace Bertram's long locks and bare knees were an eyesore to him, his habits a perpetual offense. He hated the whole race of curled darlings with the undiscriminating vehemence of a self-made man.

As for Matilda, she was second favorite with her

mother, — always an extremely delicate child ; a regular featured, cold, correct child, with something supercilious about her, even at that age; a child that never got into trouble, never tore her dresses, nor soiled her pinafores ; a child that could sew and read and crochet earlier and better than any other child; a child that did not like to lean back in her father's arms for fear of rumpling her starched frock ; generally averse to demonstration, — an absurdly priggish, "missish" little soul, it must be confessed. But Mary was not like brother or sister or parents. She was a brilliant example of that differentiation of the species which is such a hopeful or alarming fact in families.

Mary was not a beauty, she was not a model: she was a most lovably healthy, happy, human little maid; naughty and good in a breath; crying and laughing; sinning and repenting all day long; merry, loving, generous, — take my word for it, a *dear* child. The servants called her "bad," her mother thought her "troublesome," her father — well! she was the very apple of his cold gray eye, and that in spite of the fact that she was undeniably, outrageously mischievous, took every sort of liberty with him and his effects, and was no more afraid of him than of her Dutch doll. She dropped everything to run to him when he came in. She lavished sweet kisses on him, often made sweeter by syrup or jams. She romped with him, pouted with him, flouted him. She generally had an arm around his neck as she sat curled up in his lap or perched on his chair. She called him by dozens of names, all

disrespectful and utterly unsuitable. She often disagreed with him, and occasionally rebelled openly against him. But it was open rebellion; she was never mean or deceitful. And she loved him, — that was it, — she loved him.

CHAPTER V

When it became advisable for Mr. Withers to enlarge his borders again, he told his wife of the fact; and she, greatly charmed, and convinced that eastward the star of social as well as financial empire took its way, helped him to fix upon a cis-Mississippi town of importance as "just the place" they were looking for. The Denton property (with all its belongings) was sold, and the family uprooted again, with that entire indifference to past associations, and pleasure in making a change, as characteristic of young nations as young people. Their migration to the city of Philipopolis was a good deal more tedious then than it would be now; but when it was made, Mr. Withers decided in the course of a single afternoon to buy a certain "brownstone front" that happened to be in the market, and took its expensive furniture "off the hands" of the former owner.

He moved into it three days later, and in a week had entirely the air of having always owned it, so well did his wife seize the reins of government in her new state. She had stepped into a delightfully luxurious and refined establishment, in which everything was harmonious, tasteful, the gradual accumulation of people of culture, a ruined merchant and his family, who had walked out of it with only their

personal effects. She was not slow to perceive its superiority to anything she had yet known or could have devised, and examined it with the critical observation that she was in the habit of giving to anything that bore on the subject that interested her most, — society, — finding a great deal that she did not understand, and feeling that she must investigate cautiously; rejoicing in the comfort that had been represented in the "modern imps." of the advertisement of the property that had originally caught her eye. The Denton house had not lacked these in a different shape, and she had thought it, as we know, "a perfectly elegant" establishment. Yet no sooner was she brought face to face with a higher order of things than she had the wit to recognize it, and began to rise to its level with the remarkable adaptive faculty of her countrywomen.

Her education had been going on for the last seven years, steadily in some ways, intermittently in others. She had managed to spend four summers at various Eastern watering-places in that time, and had kept her eyes and ears wide open. She had studied the people whom she saw there, and found out all she could about them, in order to determine the value of their example; had imitated their toilettes, assisted unobserved at their public and therefore promiscuous festivities, listened to their conversations, watched their table manners. All the flotsam and jetsam that she had found floating on the surface of this society she had caught at eagerly, examined, remembered, and either retained or rejected, according to her estimate of its practical

worth, its chance of serving her purpose. And it was wonderful how she caught its tone, slowly at first, and then more and more rapidly as her mind grew more flexible, and her capacity for absorption and digestion increased.

Perhaps it was because she was so thoroughly in sympathy with its aims, standards, ambitions. She measured not only others but herself by its standard, which alone showed more than ordinary acumen, and set to work to bring herself up to it, as far as she understood it. Nor did she relax her efforts to secure that end when she returned to Denton. She had her children taught by the most competent persons in the place, and on the pretext of preserving order, stayed with them during school hours. She also helped them to prepare their lessons in the evening, and in various ways acquired a respectable knowledge of the ordinary branches of an English education. She corrected all the glaring faults of her speech, and effected a number of minor reformations in her dress, habits, and manners, less vitally necessary, but also important to her purpose, showing great tact in subordinating the old to the new, uprooting radically in her environment only such things as seemed to her to cry aloud for suppression, and cleverly contenting herself with modifying others wherever it was possible to do so. Undertaken in a better cause and from different motives, there would have been something heroic in the way she had entered upon and persevered in this humiliating apprenticeship.

Society, with its caste spirit of exclusiveness, is

always blowing itself up into little ridges consisting principally of certain commonplace people who delight to form themselves into *coteries*, and like to fancy that they are riding on the topmost crest of a sort of social spring tide in the Bay of Fundy. These are always being effaced, in America at least, by what Lowell calls "the heavy roller of democracy," but human nature revolts from every attempt to reduce mankind (and more especially womankind) to one dead, unflattering level, and confound people who know themselves to be very remarkable persons, indeed, *quite* out of the ordinary run, with "the undistinguishable many," so that every community in the country that has had time to crystallize at all has the smooth surface of its little mill-pond vexed with a succession of ripples in the shape of "sets," and one awful tidal wave, at least a foot high, known as "*the* set."

Philipopolis was no exception to this rule, but rather a notable example of it. It was a handsome, prosperous city, anxious to establish its superiority in point of population, wealth, and intelligence to another city not a thousand miles away, and not without claim to a distinction that it greatly insisted upon, that of being "a social centre." So when the Withers family dropped suddenly down into the centre of that centre, one of the largest houses in the best quarter of town, it is no wonder that the event gave rise to the liveliest comment, and it became a question of the greatest importance whether they were to be "received" or "ignored" by "*the* set," and if not by the latter, to what set they

would be relegated. After having been regarded with the proper degree of suspicion for the right length of time, they were subjected to certain tests by society, represented chiefly by a lady accustomed to take the lead in such matters, and known by the somewhat remarkable title of "Mrs. Judge Sutton."

After the application of these reagents she summed up the result mentally: The Witherses had come from a great distance (a point in their favor, as throwing just enough light on their past, obviating the necessity of adopting a whole connection, and making it impossible for the most skilled graduate in the art of defamation to gossip about them in detail); they were credibly reported to be immensely rich; they had come by their money respectably; they were handsomely established in the community. But even so, Mrs. Judge Sutton, as became a wary bell-wether, nibbled and browsed about them with every possible precautionary and tentative process before committing herself. Quite a number of the people who are always ready to make the acquaintance of anybody, with or without pretext or reason for doing so, had called, and still the great lady held back, and waited to hear what she could from common report, the better to decide the question of the social eligibility of the new aspirants for her recognition, — for it was in this way that she regarded her prestige.

At last she was attracted by a rumor that Mrs. Withers had returned none of her visits. That looked so encouraging, from her point of view, that she decided to take the risk and call. She called,

was very civil, as inquisitive as she decently could be, and decidedly cold, not to say supercilious. Mrs. Withers, who had taken care to inform herself as far as possible about the community in which she was to live, took in the situation at a glance, with swift, sympathetic comprehension. She had previously determined to get into society in Philipopolis; she knew that Mrs. Sutton was the arbiter of her destiny in that respect; she felt for the first time that she was in a position to hold her own, and that if she ever meant to fight with the beasts at Ephesus, this was the moment to begin.

The whole question of the future of her heart resolved itself into getting the better of Mrs. Sutton. And she got the better of her. She was her superior in strength of will, acuteness of perception, intelligence. She dominated from the first a lady accustomed to ruling. She had the penetration to divine that to submit was to be lost; that this was no occasion for affability or amiability. Dignified, and very reserved, she tried to throw into her manner the nameless something that she remembered in Mrs. De Trobriand, and had seen and recognized occasionally in other ladies. She differed with Mrs. Sutton, moreover, and contradicted her. She did not return her visit for six weeks. She played her little game with absolute coolness and admirable cleverness, and her shrewd estimate of the enemy's position and forces gained for her a complete victory.

It was one of the victories that is so much worse than any defeat. Mrs. Sutton, who had meant to

subdue, to tolerate, to encourage, to patronize benevolently, to condescend with exquisite affability, found herself by a *coup d'esprit* reluctantly admiring, secretly respecting, actually yielding to the stranger. She returned Mrs. Withers's visit promptly, and of course all the sheep whose practice it was to wait until she got over the fence took it now at a bound, and were quite charmed to frisk and gambol about or with Mrs. Withers in the pleasant pastures beyond, and could hardly bleat out enough admiration of "her handsome person," "beautiful house," "dear children."

The deed was done. Mrs. Withers was in society, though not, as yet, of it exactly, — a society local, provincial, and sometimes charged with being indiscriminate, but far superior to any she had known. She felt with a throb of delight that now, at last, she was to have an opportunity of exercising all her talents and gratifying all her ambitions. She had standing-room, a stable foundation for the edifice she intended to rear, an influential sponsor. The way was open. She saw it stretching away before her, a fine, stately avenue, and herself walking down it proudly and triumphantly. This first distinct gain was the more enjoyed because it had come to her by degrees, and was largely the result of her own long self-discipline. She had never lost faith in herself and her future, even when there had been least to encourage her in the conditions and circumstances of her life.

For this chance she had waited and striven and studied, and if "prayer is the voiceless aspiration

of the heart," had prayed; but now that it had come, she knew that she never could have availed herself of it, if she had not "improved" herself; and knowing this, she determined to know all that was knowable of the higher sphere into which she had made her way, and get every ray of further light on its usages, laws, customs. She did not see it, of course, but her progress up to this point had been in its inception and development a most interesting study in Biological Sociology, strictly scientific in its stages of growth, — Mortification, Conformity to Type, Parasitism. She managed the last uncommonly well. When she had got a certain mastery over Mrs. Sutton, and through her had met the principal people of "the set," she attached herself to them all, got up a high-pressure intimacy with most of them, gushed sweetly over them and about them, entertained them, contrived to put herself on a footing of perfect equality with them. It was a delicate operation, but she gave to it all her energies, and succeeded astonishingly. Fastidious persons called her "loud," and shrank with distaste from her advances; simple people thought her affected; and sincere ones missed the ring of the true metal in her. But all these together only made an insignificant minority. The majority ruled out or tabled all objections, and drowned every dissentient voice.

A period of great gayety for some members of the family and prosperous advancement for all now set in. Mrs. Withers spent all her time in dressing, and driving, and dining, and visiting, and

other fashionable pursuits, many of which were shared by the children, whose mother not only followed but greatly exaggerated a bad local custom that allowed this, and saw nothing painful in the spectacle of such additions to parties of pleasure. Miss Queenie and Miss Rosebud Withers, as the two little girls were now called, were a sight to see, as they drove off in the afternoon with their mamma to make a round of calls, in gorgeous plumed hats, and silk dresses flounced to the waist, holding their parasols over their heads with one hand, and each clutching her card-case and handkerchief, or perhaps a fan, in the other. Their costumes were the admiration of an infinite number of foolish matrons, who vainly coveted the like splendors for their children; and as for the cards they left, everybody was in raptures over them, and pronounced them "perfectly sweet," or "too cute for anything." Mrs. Withers's idea was that children ought to be educated by society for society. She kept hers there as much as possible, and boasted that they had never known anything else, but had been "raised in the parlor."

Night after night, in the season, she took them out with her to balls, to the theatres, to parties of all kinds, and kept them out until every o'clock in the morning. Next day they would look very pale, and were not much disposed to go to school, where they would nod over their books, and yawn prodigiously, and give but languid attention to what was going on; but all that disappeared when afternoon came. Mrs. Withers would herself see them dressed

after dinner, and carry them off to dancing-school, where they were quite the show-pupils of the great Professor Alcide Xavier Ledoux, who had been *maître de ballet* at the Grand Opera in Paris (or said that he had), and could not only spin and twirl, and balance and pirouette, and perform every other *pas* known to the profession himself, but had so carefully trained the children under his charge that they might easily have been mistaken for the fairies and cupids and gnomes and sprites of this or that spectacular play, and could have made a creditable début in any of these rôles on any stage in Europe.

Little Mary especially was so beautifully formed, so pretty, and so graceful that the professor gave her twice as much of his valuable time and counsels as he accorded to any other pupil; and more than once he was so transported by her charming movements that he would seek her mother and exclaim, "Give me that child, and I will make her the first dancer in Europe! The *first* dancer, madame, mark you! What more can madame desire for her daughter? *C'est une petite Ellsler. Oui.*" If Mrs. Withers had really been fitting the child for that career, she could not have looked on more complacently than she did at Mary, bending, bowing, kneeling, gliding, sliding, walking on the tips of her toes, whirling, bounding, gallopading, doing the scarf-dance, the ribbon-dance, the Highland Fling, the Cachucha, the Pas de L'Imperatrice, and Heaven knows how many others. Mary, whose skirts were of the shortest, whose hair was frizzed with hot irons about her face very much as if it had been the most

artfully constructed wig of the Louis Quatorze period, and flowed unconfined to her waist at the back; Mary, in white satin slippers, flesh-colored hose, a blue silk frock, a Valenciennes lace overdress, a handsome set of turquoises; Mary, powdered, and — record it not, dear angels! — rouged! — the sweetest, brightest little face that the sun could see in a day's journey; round baby cheeks that ought to have been as fresh, as velvet-smooth, as delicately pink, as the petals of the wild rose on a June morning.

Naturally, after such exertions, the child was not always able to keep awake during a five-act play at the theatre, and laying her head down on the red plush railing of the box, would fall fast asleep, — a dreadfully weary little figure, that cried aloud for a white nightgown and a cot, so plaintive was the droop of the long-lashed eyelids, so haggard the look of the small face in spite of the paint that ought to have reddened, indeed, to find itself there. If bad training could have ruined the child, she certainly would have grown insufferable in the years that immediately followed, for not only was she sacrificed to her mother's false ideals and fashionable aspirations, but her father continued to indulge her to any extent. While he was getting into his own hands the threads of various important enterprises into which he had at once plunged, he had consciously deferred making the change in his habits which at Denton had seemed the easiest thing in the world to do — when he should get to Philipopolis. And after that he had much less time than ever to give to

his children. "They are all right," he reflected. "They 've got all they want, or are getting it. Liz will look out for them." Conscience squeezed in her old appeal for the thousandth time, but faintly; and with an "If I had more leisure" — Mr. Withers looked away from the subject.

To watch, restrain, influence, warn the children was a thing that he could not do; it required too much of him. But he would be kind to them; oh, yes, he would be very kind to them, and give them everything that children could desire or ought to have, he thought. He could not "bother" with their faults or be "worried" with their troubles, but he was lavish with his five-dollar bills where they were concerned, was rather pleased than otherwise when they asked him for something that he could give, and always felt that he was paying something on account, — the debit and credit account between himself and them; that old claim which he had always acknowledged to himself, but had never paid outright. So he calmly went his busy way, content to have a few words daily with one or all of them, to regard them frequently with a preoccupied stare, to get off a wintry little joke, perhaps, that made them very uncomfortable and was received in uneasy silence, to praise tepidly when praise was demanded of him, and rebuke them sternly when they annoyed him particularly. The pocket-books of the trio were often bursting with greenbacks, which they were allowed to spend as they pleased, and pleased to spend in the most foolishly extravagant ways generally.

Mary (whose purse was always stuffed out with

bills, and who was as well known in the shops of the city as her mother) bought dolls, toys, books, sweets, until these ceased to have the least charm for her, and ordered the most expensive mechanical toys, when she felt the need of amusement, quite on her own responsibility, telling the clerks to "write to New York or Europe for them (if necessary), and send the bill to popper," as a matter of course. Nor was she intent alone upon getting these things, for, being a generous-hearted child, she found it even more agreeable to give them away again. She poured out a perfect stream of benefactions upon a family of poor children living in the alley back of her father's house; indeed, not content with presenting them with her own effects, she went a step farther, and endeared herself to them considerably before it was discovered that she was "giving the McCarthys" a highly miscellaneous collection of tableware, jewelry, books, handkerchiefs, toilet-soap, and whatever struck her as likely to be useful to them.

Mr. Withers was highly amused when he heard of her lively interest in their needy neighbors, but pretended to be offended when he spoke to her about her charities. "What did you do that for, Polly? What did you give all those things away for?" he asked, with mock anger.

"Well, popper, you see, they are awful poor. They have n't got anything to eat, or to wear, hardly, and I thought they might as well have some of our things," she replied.

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, don't let me hear

of your giving them anything more," said Mr. Withers.

"Oh, you horrid, mean old popper! You old greedy, greedy!" exclaimed pert Polly, not in the least alarmed or abashed. "Why don't *you* give them some chairs and tables and things yourself, then? They have n't got a chair to sit on, 'cepting one that has n't any bottom to it. Pat, that 's the one next to the baby, he fell through it yesterday. And my! how he did squall! Mrs. McCarthy, that 's Mr. McCarthy's mother, can iron twenty-six shirts in a day. She 's an elegant ironer and washer. She ain't there now. Next-door 's got a baby, and she has gone there to cook. Mrs. McCarthy, that 's Mr. McCarthy's wife, says she don't know where the rent 's to come from. And I told her you had plenty of money, and you 'd give her some. Under her room is down in the kitchen."

"I can't support the McCarthys, Polly," said Mr. Withers decidedly, putting a period to her reminiscences of the most interesting family she knew. "And mind, I forbid you to go there again! I don't know what your mother has been thinking of to allow it. Promise me that you won't."

But this Polly refused to do. She had no idea of giving up the McCarthys, and would not pretend that she had. "I won't promise. I like to go, and I will go. Why, that 's nothing to make a fuss about, popper, so just you hush up! I don't do anything bad. I just play with the baby. Mrs. McCarthy lets me wash up the dishes sometimes, and Mr. Dennis McCarthy, that 's Mr. McCarthy's brother, says I do

it as tidy as if I was grown up, — better than some that's grown-up. Now, don't you go making any more fuss about it, popper, 'cause it 's all nonsense. Do you hear?"

Mr. Withers did hear, and privately resolved to "give Liz a piece of his mind." Polly to be running wild like this! What was he paying all these servants and teachers and guardians for, if it was not to care for and shield all his children, his own little Polly most especially! Polly was very especially his own. He felt that more and more. Matilda seemed to stand aloof from him somehow, and Wallace was getting more unsatisfactory every day. But Polly was not like the others. It had not been necessary for him to "waste his time" trying to understand Polly, and study her character, and find out what she was like. She had made him a present, as it were, of all this information by insisting on being intimate with him under difficulties, and but for her very limited opportunities, would have shown him in the course of her unreserved prattle all that there was to see in the limpid depths of her child's heart.

As it was, it amused and cheered him wonderfully sometimes, when he was oppressed by the cares or doubtful of the issues of his business, to forsake that noisy, clamorous assemblage in the Board Room, in which every man was coiled like a serpent ready to strike with darting precision at this or that point, and he himself had been for weeks focusing all his vital energies upon some scheme that he was interested in, playing matador to the "bulls," and

squeezing the life out of the "bears," — it was an immense relief, I say, to leave all this and "go home to Polly." It had come to that. He no longer thought of it as "going home to Liz," and, indeed, unless by appointment, it would not have been an easy thing for him to find his wife on most days of the week. He always thought of her as "at home," but as a matter of fact Mrs. Withers, like himself, was busy, and like himself was too pressed for time to be able to give many hours to the children, now that they were at school.

She surrounded them with every comfort, and exercised a general supervision over them; she did not begrudge a whole morning spent in choosing a "Princess Metternich" blouse, or a "Sandringham" overcoat, or a "Palmerston" coat for them; she punished them if they neglected their persons, or were reported to have failed in their lessons; she had her own plans for each of them. But unlike her husband, it never once entered her mind that she had any further duty to fulfill toward them. To be well mannered, well dressed, well educated, and present the right social surface to such persons of position as interested themselves languidly in them, was all that she required of them. That was all that society demanded, and to satisfy society was all-sufficient for her. And had she not engagements without end, really important engagements that she must keep? Husband and wife were alike "catching at straws and following the wind," and meanwhile the children were growing up; growing up strangers practically to both parents, who knew

scarcely anything, really, of their temperaments, tastes, occupations, friendships, much less their thoughts and motives; growing up without the gentle, powerful, all-important influences of home life, and with all the strength and sweetness of home love, its interests, joys, sorrows, sacrifices, almost unknown to them.

When Mr. Withers would come in and call for "Mary," that young person was not slow to respond. She was always ready to talk, to walk, to play, to do anything he might suggest. And when he was not in the mood for anything that involved any exertion, he would drop into a chair and tell her to brush his hair, knowing very well that there was nothing she liked better. Off she would dart like a swallow, and return in a flash with a towel, that required a good deal of adjusting before it was arranged to suit her. And then she would busy herself tremendously in her rôle of barber, pulling out the gray hairs at a cent apiece, brushing, brushing briskly, lazily, eccentrically, combing his scanty tresses up into a puff on top of his head "like Mrs. McCarthy's sister's baby," parting it in a dozen different ways, and chattering all the while cheerily, pertly, unreservedly, with the swift alternations of temper, tone, and subject that gave such variety and light and shade to her conversations.

There are noises and noises, as we all know, and Mr. Withers did not mind the sound of that clear treble piping, no matter how much he was suffering from nervous exhaustion. After being on edge all day and for many weeks, it soothed him, much as the

sound of falling water, or of a brook rippling away through green meadows, might affect a man just released from the whir and hum of a machine-shop, and healed the wounds of the deafening din whose uproar often penetrated into his very dreams. It took all the tangles out of him, and as moment after moment went by of the light touches, the passing and repassing of the brush, the chirp of his little thrush, he would close his eyes and lean back, his face would lose its cast-iron look of rigidity, and if Polly had been in front of instead of behind him, she would have seen all the lines of it gradually relax, soften, sweeten. Her treatment of him at these times was extremely capricious. As a rule, she demanded a certain amount of attention on his part; and if in the earlier stages of manipulation his mind wandered to such subjects as "margins," "conversions," "collaterals," and he kept too quiet for her taste, or answered at random, he was pretty sure to be made aware of the fact by a smart blow from the brush.

In fact, Polly was quite in the habit of punctuating the performance in this way, with lesser taps for commas, increasing in violence until she came to one that represented a full stop and inquiry into the causes of his being "such a horrid popper," or more generally "a horrid, old, bald-headed, hateful popper," for Polly was a fluent speaker, and was much given to the use of opprobrious adjectives, which excited only a smile. Sometimes when she was tired of "working so awful hard," she would slip around and drop into his lap, where she could talk with

more comfort and get the immediate effect of what she said, play or be played with, tease or be teased, pet or be petted. Sometimes she graciously allowed her father to take a nap, and went mothering about him, putting a shawl over his knees, shielding his eyes from the light, and crying, "Ssh! my baby is asleep," in a tone of pert importance when anybody came into the room, for which the prim Matilda would rebuke her as "silly" and "ridiculous."

It was on one of these occasions that Mr. Withers took particular note of Mary's appearance and said, "Polly, are you well? You look — well, you don't look *right!* And yet your color is good. How do you feel?" whereupon Polly announced that she was "just sick and tired of parties," and gave a full and frank account of her late festivities, complained only of being "sorter tired all the time," and exposed her mother's little device for obviating the defect of unbecoming pallor in woman or child. Mr. Withers was extremely displeased, and heard a great deal more in her recital than she had expressed. But one of the veins of gold in his rough ore had led him to always speak to his children of their mother with absolute respect; in fact, as altogether his superior in every way. So now he found no fault, but pushed Polly rather brusquely off his lap, and began to march up and down the room, with his hands stuffed deep in his pockets, and a heavy frown of displeasure on his face as he kicked out of his path the footstool that had certainly done nothing worse than offer a convenient vent for his irritation. "I don't like it," he said at last. "I 'll speak to your mother about it."

He did speak to his wife, and at greater length than usual, and she called him "a perfect idiot," by way of proving conclusively that her system of management for the children was faultless. Everybody, she said, had remarked how "easy" Mary and Matilda were in their manners, and Wallace was not one bit shy; and all because they were accustomed to society. It was "all nonsense," the idea that they were not getting enough sleep; what had put that in his head? And she had only once or twice just "tipped" Mary's cheeks with a little pink powder when she was frightfully pale. As to other vague accusations, they were "all nonsense," too. "I do look after the children, and I do teach them. I am fifty times as much with them as *you* are, that's certain," she said promptly, carrying the war into the enemy's country. "And as for their going to church, they can go to church whenever they want to. There is our pew for them to go to at Mr. Wadē's church, and there's Dr. Procter's church, if they like that better. I don't care how often they go, so I don't have to take them."

"Why can't you take them?" asked Mr. Withers.

"Because I can't. I can't go every Sunday. Why don't *you* take them, if it comes to that?" replied Mrs. Withers, with heat. "If you are so particular about them, you can do that."

"*Me?*" exclaimed he, with the most genuine horror at the proposition. "Oh! that's impossible; perfectly impossible. But you go, anyway, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I go sometimes. I like to go to Dr. Procter's sometimes. All the best people go there," said Mrs. Withers, who spoke but the truth about the matter. She had been a passably zealous Baptist in Eureka, where that was the fashionable faith, but in Philipopolis she had seen, at once, that the sheep of that fold were reckoned as goats by Mrs. Judge Sutton and her set; and being much too shrewd a woman to make the mistake of appearing as irreligious as she was, she had compromised by going semi-occasionally to several churches, and took great credit to herself for her "liberality."

Of these, she decidedly preferred the one known as "Dr. Procter's" (not that that gentleman had founded a religion of his own any more than his friend, Mr. Wade). It was handsome, it was luxuriously furnished, and above all it was extremely fashionable, its pastor being an eloquent Unitarian divine, who was much lauded for having cheerfully left his parish in Boston to take a cure of souls in the West, although he had certainly been well paid for doing so, in this life, by a congregation which, like most congregations made up of "the best people," was good for a large salary always, whatever it may have lacked in other forms of piety. Their pastor liked that kind of congregation, and they were equally well pleased with their pastor, — he was so delightfully suave, social, agreeable out of the pulpit, and in it so exquisitely mellifluous, so full of all honeyed utterance, so pleasantly sure that everybody would be saved. All the doctor's souls were sugar-cured, and naturally only very rich peo-

ple could afford to have such expensive treatment for their sins, so that the collective fortunes of the vestry alone amounted to so many millions that the community was never done boasting of them, and the owners of the chief seats in that synagogue made broad their phylacteries, and paid as much for their pews as many people do for their houses.

Mr. Wade, who kept to the old and priceless method of plain preaching and noble living, who taught the law, indeed, but first "followed it himself," like Chaucer's priest, — Mr. Wade had not a tithe of the doctor's reputation, and a lamentably unfashionable following. And Mrs. Withers soon deserted his standard altogether. His thin cheeks and large eyes annoyed her vaguely, and why was he so disagreeably menacing at times, so vehement, so enthusiastic? And what *was* there about the man that reminded her of Aunt Packer, whom he in no way resembled? She answered all these questions for herself by betaking herself to the doctor's church, when she went at all, and there she heard nothing that could have alarmed or disturbed any creature, however well satisfied with himself, — or, indeed, comforted any sinner, however miserable. Frederick Locker's verses, if they could have been disguised as a hymn, might have done that snugly prosperous assemblage some good; but it is quite impossible to fancy bland Dr. Procter giving out to "Little Pedlington," common metre, —

> "The world 's an ugly world. Offend
> Good people, how they wrangle!
> Their manners that they never mend —
> The characters they mangle!

"They eat, and drink, and scheme, and plod —
They go to church on Sunday,
And many are afraid of God,
But more of *Mrs. Grundy*."

Mrs. Withers had some "dear friends" in it, and when the season in Philipopolis was over, she made her plans for the summer in a way that would allow her to escape the pang of a six months' separation from them. She took her children and joined them wherever they were. She took her servants, also, and her carriage, and she took her trunks. There were twenty of them, all full of the most gorgeous raiment that money could buy, and go where she would, she found herself one of the most striking figures present. This delighted her; and stimulated by what she felt to be extraordinary success, and failing to see that notoriety is not celebrity, she strove the more to keep herself always *en evidence*. And she did attract a great deal of attention, thanks to her beauty, her toilettes, and the rumor that her husband was enormously rich. Society picked up its lorgnon and stared at her curiously, and laid the glass down again, and whispered to its neighbor something that it would not have gratified her to hear.

Poor Mrs. Withers knew quite well that she was being observed, and with swift intuition understood that she had been brought before a supreme court and condemned. She saw Alps rising behind Alps, serene, calm, snow-clad, where she had for a moment supposed that all was a level plain, and immediately despised herself for having so greatly overrated the

social altitude of the Philipopolis molehills, and prepared undauntedly for fresh ascents, new toils, dangers, victories. Each gain that she had made had served her but for the time, and then had come the wider outlook and the renewed resolution to overcome every obstacle and scale every height. She was more than willing to "leave her low-vaulted past," and she lived a great deal in a lofty future, if not a noble one. As for "outgrown shells," she looked back upon her life in Eureka and Denton with infinite disgust and a profound sense of humiliation; and now Philipopolis was dwindling into the same catalogue of shrunken ideals.

The fifth of these seasons she spent at Cape May, and while there a lurid light was cast on the path she had marked out for herself, as well as the one she had been traveling for some time past. It chanced one evening that she left the ball-room of the hotel at which she was stopping and went out on the veranda in search of fresh air. She had been feeling extremely complacent all during the affair in consequence of having been particularly conspicuous, owing to the richness of her dress and its effect in heightening her beauty. And for the preceding half hour, she had been watching her little Mary dance. The child had taken upon herself to ask the leader of the orchestra to "play something for the Highland Fling," and that good-natured Teuton had complied, seeing that there was a lull in the tempestuous tossings and lurchings of the German waltz which had been raging for an hour. Whereupon Miss Mary Withers, without the faintest

shadow of embarrassment, had got out on the floor alone, and then and there, with the aplomb of an actress of fifty, had given a public exhibition of the accomplished Ledoux's "Saut Ecossais," starting at the top of the room and coming down it with eyes sparkling, curls waving, ribbons flying, and her charming little feet skipping, sliding, gliding, doing everything that feet can do. Every eye in the room was riveted upon the child, enchanted by her grace, and attracted by what may justly be called the performance.

When she had given the very last twirl, everybody applauded loudly, and supposed that the episode was over. But they were mistaken. Mary had been far too much praised for her dancing, for years, not to have an excellent opinion of it herself, and so, without waiting to be urged, she ran off down the room, for all the world like a white satin butterfly, an immense sash floating up and down as she moved, her silken-cased legs looking strictly professional even when off duty, and reaching her friend the leader, she tiptoed in prettiest fashion and whispered something, to which he responded, "Ya! ya!" The music began again, and Mary, with an innocent, lamb-like little bound, took her place for the Cachucha. Unfortunately, Mrs. Withers's heart was not only throbbing with delight, but her head was pulsing painfully from the heat of the room, so she betook herself to the open air. Finding the coolness and darkness most grateful, she dropped into a seat near one of the French windows, through which she could still see Mary's gratifying

triumphs. There were two ladies sitting inside, — two ladies who did not see her, but whom she could see, and recognized as belonging to a party of people who had come there from New York, — very "exclusive" people, she had heard them called, her informant being the clerk of the hotel, who had given her a long account of them, — their enviable position, great wealth, and influence in society.

She had been eager to hear all she could about them, and had put them under her microscope and studied them as diligently if not as intelligently as an entomologist might a strange and beautiful scarabæus, and with the same end in view, that of classification. They were members of the self-constituted tribunal from whose decision she felt there was no appeal, the court of inquiry that had not tried her, but had rather passed her in review. She took in every detail of their toilettes unperceived, and saw that their splendor was not her splendor, but differed from it in an inexplicable fashion that was most baffling. And she was listening respectfully to their remarks, which in the same way seemed half familiar, half in an unknown tongue, in spite of the fact that they were speaking English, when the elder of the two (a white-haired, severely judicial woman of dread aspect, who seemed to be always sitting on the social woolsack, bearing about with her the mace of public opinion like a kind of female Lord Chancellor) startled Mrs. Withers by mentioning her name.

A conversation followed that filled that lady with indignation, amazement, and all uncharitableness.

She heard herself called "pronounced," "vulgar," "made-up," "over-dressed," and criticised with a frankness reserved apparently for these unfortunate occasions. The Chancellor had "never seen a more melancholy spectacle" than was presented at that moment by that "poor little Withers child," and following her gaze, Mrs. Withers's puzzled eyes rested on Mary, holding up her skirts a bit, and courtesying *à la danseuse* to the right and left in a way that would have enchanted Ledoux. The Chancellor deplored such publicity and dissipation for any child, and asserted that with a hoop and some spangles she would "make the fortune of a circus, but that of course it was not her fault but her misfortune that she was being brought up in that odiously spectacular, suicidal way." And her friend seemed quite to freeze the Chancellor's blood by a low-toned revelation of a fact she had observed: *the child was painted.* There was not a doubt of it, and Western depravity could no further go.

When Mrs. Withers burst away from the dreadful spot, where she had been chained by vanity and curiosity, she fairly breathed out flame and fury like a dragon of old. She rushed up to her room and tore off the finery with which she had been so pleased. She sobbed, she raged, she stormed, and finally she packed her trunks as if it were a matter of life and death to get away from that hotel, and next morning left for home before the sun had so much as thought of getting up.

CHAPTER VI

Mrs. Withers had received a dreadful blow and been wounded in her most vulnerable part, and such wounds to shallow natures have all the suffering and none of the consolations of the deadly thrusts that come to nobler ones; these last may indeed have the immortal in them scarred, but have sources of healing and comfort undreamt of by those whose best joy is really a sadder thing than the worst pang of the divinely miserable.

To have "music mixed with our thoughts and be saddened by heavenly doubts" is one thing. To have the grape of life turn into a pill that yields nothing even in the winepress but the myrrh of mortification, the aloes of disappointed hopes, and the rottenness of apples of Sodom, is quite another. The wretchedness of Mrs. Withers was not that of a Romola, but the ignominious distress that overwhelmed her for a time was all the harder to bear. It was certainly most discouraging to feel, after all the pains she had taken to shake off local peculiarities and provincialisms, and in every way educate and improve herself, that she should have the gates of her Paradise shut in her very face, and hear the daughters of Lucifer declare that she was not like unto them.

If she could have thought them prejudiced against

her, and could have detected any bias in the judgment rendered, she would not have felt so sorely miserable; but it was so evident that they were quite uninfluenced by anything like anger or malice, that when the shock of her awakening and the tumultuous emotions to which it had given rise had passed away, each separate count in the indictment recurred to her and demanded a hearing.

It was some time before the mists of anger and prejudice cleared sufficiently for her to see the truth that had been so painfully presented, and even to herself she would not admit that it was the truth; it was longer before she gave any heed to it. But after a while the cooler counsels of her astute brain prevailed. All her pride was in arms. Should she confess herself defeated and voluntarily take a lower place than the one occupied by the women whose criticisms had so deeply offended her? No, a thousand times! She would seat herself beside them on that dais, she vowed, and, if possible, humble them as they had humbled her. She held in her hand the key to that world, and nothing should keep her out. She would become a woman of fashion, too, the highest fashion, and no one should have it in his power to ridicule or despise her. With her usual intelligence, she readily grasped the fundamental postulate that society is a joint-stock association, limited, and that it is perfectly possible for the person who has millions invested in it to exercise a controlling influence.

Her first idea had been to get into it at all hazards. But now she was not content with that. She

wished to vindicate her right to be there; to reign, not serve. Most likely she would never have attained sufficient insight into the constitution and laws that governed that world to accomplish this, if she had been left to herself; and if her complacent illusions about herself had not been so rudely dispelled, she would probably have been doomed to a wholesome insignificance. Very soon, however, she began to show the effect of valuable criticism, and got from her very pride enough humility to apply it properly. Certain things were characteristic of the people that lived in that world and breathed its rarefied air. What were they? She would find out. They did not make themselves "conspicuous," for one thing, — that fact was one of a group that she was not likely to forget. The mysteriousness of the command, "Thou shalt not be vulgar," was equaled only by its imperiousness. She sat down before the idea, and besieged it, and gradually got hold of some of its superficial aspects. And then, having admitted her social fallibility, she set to work with all her old thoroughness and energy to rebuild her card-house on different lines.

She gave up rouge, powder, belladonna, and the like. She ordered her dresses from Paris; and if the Chancellor could have looked over her shoulder, she would have been surprised to see a great deal of stress laid upon the necessity of choosing materials and styles that were not "conspicuous." She took her daughters away from dancing-school, and put them into the most sober garb of Quakerish grays and browns, and that done, sent them off to

a fashionable school in New York. She joined a reading-club, and took lessons in French privately, and so arrived at a stage of culture that craved exotic expression imperatively; and rechristened her "Queenie" and "Rosebud" "Mathilde" and "Marie," by which names she ever after insisted upon their being known. Nothing that was native satisfied the need of the moment. She must not only have polish to fit her for the polite world, but it must be French polish, which she thought was the lacquer of lacquers among the fashionable. If books on etiquette had been taught in the public schools of Philipopolis as they are in those of Japan, Mrs. Withers would have entered the infant class and have graduated long before the most advanced pupil, if natural aptitude and utter devotion to these great matters had counted for anything.

As it was, she studied them under difficulties, chiefly by the Socratian method, and set herself to learn all that she wanted to know, or that those about her could teach her, not with a view to a noble education or philosophic speculation, but in a most business-like and purposeful fashion, intending to make immediate and practical use of it. She acquired a great deal of the kind of knowledge that she coveted; sucked it in like a sponge at every pore, indeed, and gave it out again as little changed as might be by having passed through the medium of her mind. Etiquette, being the true doctrine of infinitesimals, ought perhaps to receive more able treatment than it gets in the numerous works devoted to it.

But Mrs. Withers found no fault with those she bought and pored over, giving, as they did, the most important information about the very things in which she was most interested, and showing in the most clear and exhaustive fashion not only how to live, dine, dress, entertain, visit, condole, congratulate, but actually how to die and be buried "according to the latest fashionable usage." She made copious extracts from them when she wrote to her daughters, and exuded the gentility she had imbibed in such a wonderfully natural way that Miss Piper, the principal of the educational establishment for young ladies, to whose care they had been intrusted, got the impression that Mrs. Withers was "most particular," and wrote to her at great length, expatiating on the advantages her school offered for "acquiring colloquial French," French being, she said, the language of her family; "a distinguished manner that fitted her pupils for any salon;" and "all those accomplishments which would make the possessor a brilliant ornament of any society in which she might be thrown." The report she inclosed showed their standing in Italian, German, French, Latin, astronomy, chemistry, botany, physical geography, moral philosophy, ancient history, modern history, mathematics, calisthenics, and deportment.

In all of her letters she dwelt on the "astonishing progress the dear girls were making in everything." "Marie is thought the most beautiful of my pupils, and Mathilde the most stylish; both are great favorites," she wrote. "In accordance with your wishes

and my own views, I take them to everything in the shape of concerts and lectures that is calculated to improve their taste, and occasionally even to a play, if it is of a very superior character, likely to form their minds. And I am happy to say that they are maturing and developing in every direction with a rapidity that surprises even me, accustomed as I am to watch the beautiful unfolding of the bud into the flower."

To this and similar effusions was invariably added a bill as long as Leporello's, with every other item an "extra," and before closing, Miss Piper called attention to the fact that she had *soirées* every week, to which "only the most elegant people in New York" were admitted, and at which Mathilde and Marie were "remarked by *everybody*, and no wonder, for the way in which they entered and left a room was so entrancingly graceful that no one could fail to be struck by it." As to these statements the truth was about as follows: French may have been the language of Miss Piper's family, but it certainly was not the tongue of Miss Piper, or of anybody else in the "Establishment" except Mlle. Mably, who was supposed to impart it by the following intelligent method: —

First, one hour daily *en classe*, half of which was spent in lecturing fifty-three young ladies, at least forty of whom were careless, giggling, inattentive, listening or not listening, as they pleased, to what "that horrid old Mably" had to say about Roman History, French Grammar, and what not, and catching about a third of the sentences she

poured out with Parisian volubility and shrillness; the other half devoted to hearing recitations, lessons previously prepared, or most generally not prepared at all. Second, one hour daily, the dinner hour, and forty minutes additional, divided between breakfast and supper, and ushered in by a gong which had not done clamoring when Mademoiselle issued from her room and joined the girls, who awaited her in the schoolroom, and whose giggling could be heard above the clang of the brass clapper. More giggles, and more chatter greeted her "*Silence! Quel enfantillage!*" and then the company formed into a procession and marched with painfully suppressed giggles and chatter through the hall into the dining-room, where Mademoiselle placed herself at the head of a long table and waited until the pupils had taken their places, which they did after a brief scrambling interval, in which each girl seemed bent upon taking some other girl's seat. The giggles and chatter now burst out again, and would have done so if Mademoiselle could have been changed into a turnkey or *gendarme*, and the long, low room in which they stood into an apartment in the Bastile. Another imperative "*Silence!*" from Mademoiselle, who raised her hand as a signal, and forthwith a cry went up, a loud, confused sort of hullabaloo, that lasted about ten seconds. It was "the French grace," but it would have puzzled Voltaire to recognize one word of it as it issued from fifty-three pairs of rosy lips.

Perhaps it was "the French of Stratford atte Bowe;" it certainly was the French at Miss Piper's.

Fifty-three chairs were dragged back, the pupils seated themselves, Mademoiselle cried warningly, "*Français! Français, s'il vous plaît, Mesdemoiselles!*" the dinner or breakfast or supper, as the case might be, began. The giggles and chatter, momentarily intermitted, broke out again, worse than ever. Mlle. Mably, with another ineffectual and indifferent "*Silence!*" that faintly echoed her own disgust, opened "Corinne," and in a monotonous voice that knew itself entirely drowned, read a chapter, — always one chapter exactly, from that *chef d'œuvre*. After this, Mademoiselle was going to devote herself to her dinner, though the heavens fell. And quite aware of the fact, her pupils no longer took the trouble to say "Donny-mwaw the turnips, — what 's the French for turnips?" or "Passez-mwaw les pawmes de terres and put plenty of melted butter over them," or made use of any other phrase in the extensive vocabulary employed on these occasions to convey to each other their wants, but spoke English openly, without fear or reproach, while Mademoiselle hurriedly ate of such things as were provided, and having dined, slipped "Corinne" into her pocket, rose, again lifted her hand, was deafened with another mysterious shout that might have meant anything, and really conveyed no idea whatever to anybody concerned, and then remarshaled the whole company of chatterers and gigglers back to the schoolroom.

Her active duties happily over for the day, she was only too glad to retire to her own room and meditate disparagingly on the American people, especially

les filles Américaines, read Dumas, write to the old mother in Macon, whom she supported and cherished with the patient and passionate devotion which seems a national virtue among the French, or, if too tired for that, creep into bed. It was not Mademoiselle's fault, then, but the fault of a system, that her pupils knew little more of French than of Fiji, and could neither read, write, nor speak that charming tongue with anything like real proficiency. But fortunately for Miss Piper, little as the children knew, their parents, as a rule, knew less, and were more than satisfied with the convincing evidence of progress afforded by such letters as Mary was in the habit of sending home, — letters written on fashionable paper in an immense, sprawling hand, beginning "*Ma chère Papa*," or "*Mon chère Mamma*," relating the uneventful events of the past week, almost invariably asking for money for something, and variously signed "*Toute à toi*" or "*Votre devoué est affectioné fille, Polly.*"

As for writing a clear, well-expressed, well-spelt letter in English, that was evidently not one of the accomplishments of which Miss Piper had spoken, and perhaps was altogether too ordinary and vulgar an acquisition to be included in the curriculum of a fashionable school. The "young ladies" at Miss Piper's wrote a composition once a week on "The Mind of Man," or "The Immortality of the Soul," or "The Beautiful in Nature," or some such lofty theme, which was surely altogether more important than mere commonplace correspondence. Mr. Withers, not knowing this, or not appreciating it pro-

perly, more than once called his wife's attention to "Polly's" tendency to spell certainly with an *s* and sincerely with a *c*, and her inveterate dislike generally to the ordinary as opposed to the phonetic system of writing; but that lady always maintained that "Marie" was getting "a first-class education," and he did not feel himself "a judge of the article," he said, but he *had* supposed that "good spelling" was to be had for what he was paying out every month.

When Mrs. Withers did reply to Miss Piper, she did not touch on this point, but she did say that "Marie must be made to practice regularly;" she should expect to hear her playing some "tune" when she came home again. On hearing this, Miss Piper spoke to Professor Schultz, who made a grimace, and shrugged his shoulders, and was at first very fierce. He would not hear of a tune; what "Mees Vidders" wanted was five-finger exercises for four years. However, when he came again, he brought the "Shower of Pearls" with him, and gave a lesson of twenty minutes' duration on it twice a week for the rest of the term.

The year following, they studied together "Sparkling Sands" in the same way, Mary giving a half hour's practice to it every day and succeeding in memorizing it, but complaining very much of "that tiresome old thing." She was much better pleased with the professor's choice for the third and last session, — the "Moonlight on the Sea Polka," which may be said to have been all tune, and took her father's fancy so much that she used to rattle it off for him whenever he felt himself in need of

soothing influences. She soon forgot its predecessors, but that remained with her, and he, coming in fagged and dull, would drop on a sofa sometimes and call out, "Here, Polly! Sit down there and give us that thousand-dollar polka of yours," in allusion to the fact that he had paid out that amount for her musical education first and last.

Mathilde had not reaped so richly in the fruitful fields of the "Pensionnat Piper," as Mlle. Mably always called the Educational Establishment. She had no ear for music, but she learned some things not set down in Miss Piper's interesting "Circular to Parents." They were the only things that she and most of her companions there studied *con amore*; namely, how to dress, how to "do" her hair becomingly, how to ride and drive, how to spend a great deal of money in various forms of self-indulgence, how to systematically hoodwink her teachers, how to shirk lessons and escape punishment, and last, most fascinating of all, how to flirt. Deportment, as Miss Piper often pointed out, was "in many respects the most important department of the school," and was in charge, as the circular took care to state, of "the widow of Colonel Smythe, of the Regular Army."

Whether Mrs. Smythe owed her undoubted fitness for the position she occupied to the stern training of a defunct martinet, no one could say, but certainly there never was a woman in or out of the army who was more military in her punctuality, more systematic, more of a disciplinarian. And she certainly never forgot that she was the widow of

a colonel in the Regular Army, nor allowed that fact to be overlooked by a careless world. On the contrary, she called attention to it very often, and proved by it conclusively that if *she* did not know what deportment was, it was a lost grace. Like all the world's benefactors, too, she was willing to give of her best to reclaim and improve a barbarous generation, so she put her heart into her "professional services," as she was wont to call her labors at the school.

For one thing she enthroned herself on the raised platform at the upper end of the schoolroom at ten minutes past four every afternoon in an imaginary but regally social rôle of distinguished hostess, and obliged all the Piper pupils to come in and out before her, to courtesy, sing, play, make engagements for going here or there, or excuses for breaking those previously made, manufacture polite conversation, exchange farewell compliments, and finally take their leave; in short, learn to conduct the business of society, and fit themselves for that "salon" to which the school looked as to another Walhalla.

Nor was this an altogether agreeable exercise, for Mrs. Colonel Smythe's standards were lofty, and her tongue was sharp. Awkward pupils shambling into her presence, and saying or doing the wrong thing, were apt to be received in a way that overwhelmed them with confusion, and in some cases entirely prevented their ever acquiring the "distinguished manner" which was the mark of a true Piperian, the world over. "Betsy the cook!" Mrs. Smythe would shriek out scornfully from her ele-

vated position on the platform and the still more exalted station of her imagination, when Miss Thynne, of Kalamazoo, the charity-pupil of the house, would execute her best bow, which was very bad indeed, before the tittering company. "Bridget the housemaid!" it would be sometimes, when some other humble and graceless one manœuvred in front of the grand stand, Mrs. Smythe issuing her orders the while; after which contempt and ridicule would be poured upon the defenseless delinquent, and her personal peculiarities shown up, — imitated, perhaps, — by the accomplished and refined Mrs. Smythe, in an exaggerated style that almost threw the company into convulsions.

But Mrs. Smythe was not all sarcasm, and nothing could have been more courteous and patient and painstaking, more affectionately solicitous, than her manner and counsels to other pupils. It was, "Observe, my dear Mathilde. You draw back the right foot into this position, and then bend very gently until your body is inclined at this angle. Try it, my dear child. There is a slight tendency on the part of your feet to turn in, but that is easily corrected;" or, "In shaking hands, be careful to give the slightest possible pressure, and then relax the fingers immediately. There! There! That is quite right, — perfect, I may say." Mrs. Smythe was extremely fond of her "darling Miss Withers." She said that she would make "an elegant woman," but that her sister was "a sad tomboy."

She had other dealings with her beside the serious function just described, and never had any fault

to find with her. Mathilde was very quiet at table, her light was out as soon as the first stroke of the curfew, instituted by Mrs. Smythe, rang out. Her room was always in order, her books were never dog's-eared, her lessons were always prepared (that is, she was prepared to get out of learning them), her manner was quite prudishly decorous and respectful, — she was, in short, the incarnation of deportment, and neither Mrs. Smythe nor any one else looked below that exterior. She was, in fact, quite the model scholar, the shining example of the house, and was held up as such to her fellow pupils.

The overworked and underpaid teachers, who got up at six every morning and had not so much as an hour in the day that they could call their own, certainly may be pardoned if they did not lie awake at night studying the peculiar characteristics, temptations, follies, dangers, deceits, of fifty-three pupils; and as for Miss Piper, she gave, as she said, "a general superintendence to the school." That is, she lived quite apart from it in a handsome suite of apartments, had her private entrance, her own servants, a French maid, a brougham, a large circle of acquaintances, matrimonial aspirations, and something else to do beside watching "a herd of girls," who were always going, and coming, and falling ill, and graduating, and giving trouble generally, as it was.

By dint of an ingenious system by which she got her teachers for nothing, and made the parents of each pupil pay in round numbers two thousand dollars apiece for the extraordinary advantages she

offered, she was able to afford all this and more, and gudgeons were never wanting to swallow the bait she knew so well how to prepare. Other schools failed, and broke up, and went down, but the Pensionnat Piper went on forever, like Tennyson's brook. She was an extremely clever woman, with a fine presence, an imposing air of abnormal intelligence and rectitude, and a sentimental way of talking "shop" that was highly profitable, and cloaked as calculating a nature as ever reckoned up the value of wool per pound in the very act of shearing.

"Ah!" she would say, as she drew sweetly to her side a new pupil whose parent was present; "what a responsibility am I undertaking in agreeing to educate this dear child. Used as I am to such burdens, I cannot but shrink from them when a creature like this, so young, so evidently sensitive and intelligent and affectionate, is confided to me. Sometimes I think that I will give it all up. It is too much for me. It preys on me. No one but an *angel* ought to undertake to educate a child. No one. But all that a poor fallible woman *can* do, I will do. Is she an only daughter?" (Thinks, "There may be two or more sisters.") "They are a terrible care, these children of ours, are they not? Don't scold her for treading on my feet. Dear little thing! I am used to children, you know; I will manage. Ah, they tread on our feet when they are young, but they tread on our *hearts* when they are grown, often."

This was one of Miss Piper's stock quotations,

and she had a great many like it. The child once admitted and installed, Miss Piper gave it a wide berth that made it next to impossible for it to tread on so much as the long train of the rich black silks she habitually wore. She impressed upon her teachers that she was the fountain of authority, but that they were not to draw from it too largely. "I give you the reins," she would say, "and I expect you to do your own driving, and not be appealing to me all the time. I have my own work, my own part to play. I am not musical, and for that very reason I employ you; the same is true of all the other teachers. Rely on yourselves, and only bring to me such difficulties as are out of your province and it is not in your power to deal with."

Miss Piper played her part to perfection, and although "not musical," certainly contrived to run up and down the whole gamut of parental feeling, pride, ambition, vanity, love, fear, with a firm touch and great brilliancy of execution, the result of long practice; and naturally she expected the other members of the domestic orchestra that she led to do the same. So as long as all went smoothly, she did not inquire too curiously into the *modus operandi*, and when trouble came, she consistently carried out her theory of government, held one or two teachers responsible for it, and, in either event, led an easy life of it herself. If it was a very serious matter, as in the case of one pupil who was found to have become a confirmed opium-eater, and another who ran away with the "first walking-gentleman" of the Gem Theatre, she discharged all the teachers,

and washed her hands of all participation in the unfortunate occurrence in public and private.

So long, then, as a girl could blind the anything but argus eyes of the underlings of the establishment, she had nothing to fear from the *surveillance* of the principal. Mlle. Mably, after having, in addition to all the other agreeable duties of the day, enjoyed the pleasure of correcting a few dozen French exercises that had every fault that English ones have in an aggravated and aggravating form, and after reading until eleven o'clock P. M. compositions in the same tongue as happy in the choice and as vigorously original in the treatment of subjects as such productions notoriously are, — Mlle. Mably was not disposed to make a private detective of herself and prowl about the passages for another hour or two, with a view to discoveries or investigations.

On the contrary, if she saw a telltale light streaming from under a door, she shut her eyes to it benevolently. If she came accidentally upon a pack of well-thumbed cards, or a copy of the "Mysteries of Paris," she only arched her black brows and exclaimed to herself with a little cynical chuckle, "*Hé! C'est comme ça qu'elles s'amusent!*" If a mysterious whiff of French brandy or cigarette smoke reached her from some strange source, she would look about her sharply, wrinkle up her nose doubtfully, and exclaim (also to herself), with an impulse to interfere that spent itself instantly, "*Quelle honte! Cognac! C'est un peu fort, ça!*" and then, "*Eh bien! ce n'est pas mon affaire!*" and a shrug, expressively satirical and full of mean-

ing, ending the matter so far as she was concerned. If Miss Piper, returning late from the theatre with a favored pupil whose mind she was improving by a course of entertainments of some kind, chanced to look up at the windows of the second floor, she saw "darkness there and nothing more," and for a woman who was a prey to the most cruel anxieties all the time, she certainly slept with remarkable soundness afterwards, and until late in the morning.

It is not singular, then, that in a house so temptingly wainscoted with observances that offered a retreat for the nimble-witted, bright-eyed creatures that were alternately shy and bold in their quest of adventure, and with such indifferent mousers on guard (or more generally off guard), that the mice began to play, — innocent play for the most part, but with dangerous tendencies, and attended sometimes with evil consequences. Miss Withers's diversions, for instance, were not so safe and somnolent as those of Purley. She was not yet seventeen, but she liked to be called "Miss Withers," — and for the rest she was as sly as Major Bagstock. Matilda had come into the world with an ugly moral bias, and a tendency to hypocrisy so strong that only the most careful training could have corrected it in her and taught her the beauty as well as wisdom of all frank and honorable dealing. We have seen that owing to a pressure of other business, this task of moulding her character had been left to a professional hand.

And now she was come to young womanhood selfish, envious, unloving, and unlovely, but masking

these traits by much outward compliance and smoothness of manner, fibbing as neatly as she dressed, and easily deceiving those about her by her coldly demure exterior. Briefly, Miss Withers was sometimes downtown when she was supposed to be "reciting" or "doing calisthenics;" she was not always copying her German verbs or writing out her French dictation when she had a pen in her hand, and was seen and commended, by this or that teacher, as she sat bending over her desk with flushed cheeks; nor was she invariably at the dentist's or the dressmaker's when she agreed to be.

She contrived to get a number of walks about the city without having her movements so much as challenged; she also had long talks, from which it will appear that she had a companion. And that companion was not the meek, middle-aged woman whose cheerful duty it was to act as duenna, dragon, man-trap, on these occasions, and to go here, there, everywhere with the girls, — that is, when she was not shopping, or housekeeping, or sewing for her employer. No, it was not Miss Miller, conscientious, anxious, hurried Miss Miller, the best soul that ever dwelt patiently in a pathetically ugly body, a meekly melancholy creature, one of the unloved, unwept, unsung fireside martyrs that abound in the world, and have a curious capacity for leading heroic lives of silent suffering, labor, self-abnegation, without the support of heroic motives, great enthusiasms, high ideals. Such are the common soldiers of the "noble army," with the common soldier's strange willingness to bear the brunt of a conflict that can result for him in nothing but wounds and death.

Miss Miller, indeed, was always ready at a moment's notice to go anywhere, and would trudge off in a snowstorm, or on the hottest day in summer, to leave a dozen collars at the steam laundry a mile away, or match a ribbon, or change a pair of gloves that were one shade too light or dark to please the fastidious taste of Miss Piper or one of her pampered pupils. She was perennially letting herself into or out of Miss Piper's handsome house, going on or returning from these pleasant errands, her alpaca gown gradually getting limper and rustier as the months went by. Her bonnet seemed not only to be worn all day, but had an air of having been slept in all night, mysteriously flattened in some places, and terribly "tousled" in others, besides being hurriedly tied on askew. Her gloves were always out at the fingers, and her shoes not infrequently at the toes. Her umbrella, — well, she always said of her umbrella that it "had a splendid *frame*," and considered it well named in being called "a paragon," and very like Miss Piper in that respect, to whom she was indebted for it, — thanks to its having been left behind by a pupil when she went home.

Being thus handsomely fitted out, and bent upon pleasure-seeking, it was natural that Miss Miller should not only obey all orders that might lead to these entertaining alfresco expeditions, but constantly offer her services to any one who might happen to need them. Meeting the great Western heiress, Miss Withers, in the hall several times, she had quite humbly and heartily volunteered to go wher-

ever she was going, or do whatever she wished done. But Miss Withers would none of her; she "was only going around the corner to get her photographs," she said, and "would be back directly; it was not worth while at all." Once poor Miller, coming back one rainy day from an unusually delightful little jaunt down to the wharf, was thrown into a fine excitement by seeing Miss Withers, and no other, walking with a foreign-looking gentleman, of a most dashing type, on the other side of the street, in a part of the town so dismal and commercial that it could scarcely seem other than a premeditated act.

The perfidy of it, considered in connection with the paragon, the daring of it, and her own share in it, destroyed her peace of mind for more than a fortnight. Should she tell Miss Piper? That would be dreadful. Had she not been told to "keep the girls in sight"? What trouble she would make for herself, and for that sweet Miss Marie, the culprit's sister, and for the culprit, and for everybody! It did not occur to the simple creature that she was not in the least to blame. Heaven had endowed her, it is true, with one ordinary and one swivel-eye that she could bring to bear on most things and people; but occupied as she was in other ways, she could not possibly have kept fifty-three girls in sight for one hour of the day, much less for twenty-four, and it is doubtful whether Fouché in her place would have been a match for Matilda Withers. And then, how dreadful not to tell!

Altogether, she worried herself ill over the prob-

lem, and the physician of the school having been called to see Mary, who was suffering from sore throat, was told by her to "be sure and have a look at poor old Mill" before he left, and did so, and prescribed a little nitre ("on going to bed"), for feverish symptoms, and announced authoritatively that all she wanted was "fresh air and exercise." Before she was up and about again, the Gordian knot of her difficulties had been cut. The session was over, and the Withers girls had gone back to Philipopolis. Her lingering dissatisfaction with herself, and the doubts and scruples that still remained as to how far her silence had been a golden one, vanished altogether not long after, for whom should she meet on the stair of the private entrance that led to Miss Piper's handsome suite of apartments but the Bogy of all her fears, the identical gentleman whom she had been trying to get courage to denounce as a wolf in the sheepfold!

He did not look savage nor cruel, now that she could get a good view, but quite dazzled her, even in that brief glimpse, by the brilliancy of his appearance, his prosperous, man-of-fashion *ensemble*, the lustre of his large dark eyes, the gleam of the white teeth under his waxed mustache. He appeared in extremely good spirits, and was humming the shadow-song in "Dinorah" as he rapidly descended the long flight of stairs, but, coming upon Miss Miller midway, politely stood aside, shifted the cane that he was carrying under his right arm to the left hand, and gracefully removed his hat, a courtesy that flurried her dreadfully. She acknowledged it

by an awkward little duck of the head in his direction, after which he hastened down into the lower hall and out of the front door, and she hurried up to Miss Piper's room to make the report that was always expected of her on returning from an errand.

She found Miss Piper sitting near the fire, arrayed in her new velvet walking-dress trimmed with *grêbe*, and completed by a bonnet that seemed to have grown out of the dress, and a muff that might have been left over from the bonnet, — in short, a rich and harmonious toilette. She was smilingly inspecting a card that she held in her hand, and as Miss Miller entered, said, "Maria, I have had a visit from a French nobleman, the Marquis" — (here she referred to the card again), "the 'Marquis de Luyne Mongolfier.' He saw me at the theatre, and got an introduction, and has been to two of my little evenings at the school. He says that as a stranger in New York he does n't know where to spend his evenings, and that he is very anxious to perfect his English, and has heard the school highly spoken of; and he says it is a privilege to come to my charming *soirées*, and that he looks to me to teach him 'the English of the American Academy.' Mamzelle translated what he said the first time he came. I did not understand him; at least, not quite, when he *first* came, though we got along very well to-day. But is n't it strange? He does n't seem to care to talk to her at all. You saw him as you came up, did n't you? Is n't he the handsomest man that you ever saw in all your born days? He seems to take such an interest in the school and everything."

"It is n't the school; it is *you*, and no wonder," affirmed Miss Miller, with conviction, all her sympathies aroused, and easily shifting into place one of those slides from the magic lantern of romance that all women seem to keep by them, which, the instant a flash of light is thrown on them, show forth every kind and degree of sentimental experience from Jenny's first meeting with Jessamy, through all the phases of wooing and wedding, to John Anderson's spouse going down the hill of life still leaning on the arm of her faithful "Jo, John."

"Maria Miller!" exclaimed Miss Piper, and horrified her tone as much as she could. "He is n't dreaming of such a thing! He is going away soon."

"Then he will come back," asserted Miss Piper's humble friend. "I know he will."

"You must be crazy!" exclaimed the lady principal. "Here, send this French history down to Mamzelle. And stop a moment. Your jacket is very shabby, Maria, and if you will take the trimming off the green one I wore winter before last, and cut off the buttons, you can take that, and trim it up for yourself."

"Oh, can I? Thank you! Thank you! kind, generous friend!" replied Miss Miller, overwhelmed as usual by the least evidence of consideration on the part of her distinguished patroness.

Mr. Withers was getting very dusty about the heart by this time, and was glad enough to have his "Polly" back again. He saw that she was grown, and did not doubt that she was improved, and he

enjoyed her lively accounts of the school, and her life and surroundings there, more than anything that he had heard in her absence. The mercury in his private thermometer ran suddenly up to a point that corresponded with the pleasant temperature outside, as he listened again to that fresh voice. The hearty laugh that she surprised out of him, once or twice, seemed to dispel the clouds of insect-like cares that infested his mind even when all was going well with his business.

"I shall be glad, Polly, when you have done school, and can stay at home altogether," he said. "And after a while I will retire, and we will all live along together as snug and pleasant as can be." He cheered himself very often with the thought of that time of rest and refreshment with his children, and looked to it to repay him for the sacrifices of the present; it would be a season of much peace and joy, he was sure. His son would be the staff of his old age, succeed to and carry on his vast interests. His daughters, loving and dutiful, would recompense him for all his toil and care. He told Mary something of this one day, but that vivacious young person had no interest in millenniums of any kind, and tried to turn the subject to immediate practical account.

"Oh, yes; of course that 's all very well," she said, "but why can't we have some fun *now*, popper? Why can't you take Mat and me to Niagara? We were the only girls at school that had n't seen it. And I am just dying to see it. Do take us; won't you? Do! Do! Do!"

"Take you to Niagara!" exclaimed Mr. Withers, amazed at the proposition.

"Yes, popper, to Niagara — N-i-a-g-a-r-a. Did you never hear of it before?" explained Polly, with pert impatience. "It would only be for a week. And I would give anything in this world to go shooting over the water in a canoe, — the Rapids, don't you know?"

"Spend a week at Niagara? What are you thinking of?" said Mr. Withers reprovingly. "Leave my business for a whole week to take you and Matilda to Niagara? Well, I do think! That *is* cool! I'll give you the money to go, if anybody will take you, but as to going myself, that, of course, is perfectly impossible — impossible! Your mother will take you all about everywhere when you are grown."

"Well, you never have taken us anywhere, and you never will, and it's perfectly horrid, and if you stay in business a thousand years, I never will ask you to do anything for me again, never! Not the longest day I live. Oh! boo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo!" sobbed out Polly, with schoolgirl hyperbolism and the momentary wrathfulness of her disappointment.

"Well! Well, there now! Ssh! Polly — I'll tell you a secret. We are going to New York to live in the autumn, and I'll have more time then, and some time or other I'll take you to Europe, or Canada, or up the Hudson, or somewhere out in the country — if I can. I really will, now, I promise you. Now do stop crying, my dear," said Mr. Withers, qualifying a rash promise more and more as he remembered what he was saying. "You

would n't have me neglect my work, would you? What would become of you, if I did? You don't want me to set around at home all the time, do you?"

"No, I don't. But I think you might — might do like Sadie Powers's father. He takes her to the theatre, and to concerts, and all around, and out fishing, and out yachting, and teaches her lots of things, and reads aloud to her in the evenings, and is a real good, kind, splendid father. That 's what he is. And you could do it, too. And I just despise that old office of yours, any way!" Polly whimpered out vehemently.

"H'm! What sort of business is he in?" asked Mr. Withers.

"He is an artist. He paints pictures," explained Polly.

"H'm!" Mr. Withers said again, emitting it slowly, as if to charge it with its full meaning, "an artist. He 'll never come to anything. Get my hat, Polly; I must go."

Mr. Withers was certainly not troubled with any passionate protests looking to an increased companionship with himself on the part of his other children, but Mary, in spite of what she had said, was always urging him to go to this or that place: to a lecture, to see her performances at the swimming school, to watch a game of baseball in which Wallace was to play, to the closing "exercises" of Wallace's school, to help her choose a present for Matilda's birthday, representing that he would find each of them "the greatest fun that ever was," and

never beguiling him into doing anything of the kind. Matilda had no wish whatever to be on other terms with him than she was, and did not help him out in the least in the few attempts that he made to bridge over the gulf that had been fixed between them by years of estrangement, or rather mutual ignorance and indifference, — advances very shyly and awkwardly made on his part, and received on hers with a cool self-possession that amounted to repulsion.

She did not mean either of her parents to know anything of her except what she chose to tell them; and as to her duty to them, that presented itself to her mind chiefly in the form of a deep conviction that she was greatly their superior, and ought to correct them whenever opportunity offered. She did a good deal of this, with admirable *aplomb*, directly or indirectly, her plan as a rule being to correct her mother at first hand, and her father through her mother, his habitual reserve making it somewhat difficult, even for her, to tackle him with the freedom that was essential to the reformations in manner and grammar and sentiments and tastes that she had piously undertaken. Mrs. Withers was delighted with what she considered a marked proof of her eldest daughter's superiority and culture, and with extraordinary equanimity allowed herself to be called "an old fogy" and "unladylike" and even "vulgar," heard with a smile that she was "behind the times," and was as docile and teachable a parent as ever got her education partly furnished by her own child.

She was, indeed, most eager to know what was done, and what was n't done; what was fashionable, and what labored under the terrible blight of being unfashionable; and from that day forward elevated her Mathilde to the rank of counselor-in-chief in all social matters. As for Wallace, his one idea was to keep out of his father's way as much as possible, to study as little as might be, to amuse himself with his chosen companion and friends. His father did not know it, but he had been twice expelled from school and put back by his mother's influence. His capacity for rejecting information of any kind, however minced previously, and moulded into attractive shapes, was only equaled by his crass obstinacy. Unaccustomed to discipline, of a slothful temperament, dull of brain, violent in temper, he might have defeated the efforts of wiser and better men than those set over him to make him a gentleman and a scholar.

As it was, he was not even wholesomely stupid. He had not enough manliness to make him fond of athletic sports; or, least dangerous tendency of youth, an innocent and effervescing vanity that usually expends itself in gorgeous raiment, and jewelry, and wonderful cravats, and a good deal of Lubin; or that other weakness which is such a source of strength, — a liking for the society of ladies, and a desire to appear well in the eyes of lovely woman. He was a great deal more at home in a bar-room or billiard-room or smoking-room than he was in a drawing-room, and most of all at home in a stable. His best friends were his worst enemies. At the

mature age of fifteen he rejected Christianity *in toto* and proclaimed himself "an atheist," and, leaving the world to reel under this terrible blow as it might, went on to show himself an unutterably foolish and vicious lad in a thousand lamentable ways.

"That son of Withers's is going to the dogs," more than one man about town had carelessly remarked to his neighbor in the last two years; and the neighbor had been ready with his remedies, such remedies as he would use with his own son under the same circumstances, he said. He would lock him up, beat him, have him watched, send him away on a long cruise before the mast, send him to the House of Correction for three months, do a dozen things in the line of heroic treatment of a malady in which one ounce of prevention, one word of affectionate counsel, or good example, is emphatically worth twenty pounds of such cures.

"I don't suppose that Withers has the least idea what that precious son of his is about," said one of these gentlemen, "though it is town talk." And as a matter of fact, every soul in the place except his own father knew that Wallace Withers was a dissipated idler, and gave every promise of becoming something worse.

CHAPTER VII

If Philipopolis, like Venice, had had its Golden Book, Mrs. Withers's name would now have been written high on its pages. Estimates of what constitutes a fortune differ widely, from that of the poor man, to whom twelve hundred a year stands for positive affluence, to Apicius, who killed himself because he had only two million and a half denarii left, and thought that a Roman gentleman certainly could not be expected to live on that. Judged even by the latter standard, though, Mr. Withers was a rich man, the possessor of an immense fortune, and credited with an even greater one. People said of him with vague comprehensiveness that he was "good for any amount." Promoters or advocates of this or that commercial scheme waited to see whether "Withers would back it" or "cripple it." He had interests of all kinds, in banks, mills, factories, railroads, coal mines, oil wells; companies formed to do every sort of thing; had built a theatre; and owned property of every conceivable kind and value, from entire railroads to one share of stock in a street railway, and from a hotel to a wharf.

He had spun the whole web with mathematical precision and exactness, he understood it perfectly, and kept it perfect, entirely orderly, elastic, secure, sitting in the midst of it himself like a human

spider, and holding its every thread in proper position. In order to do this, he had given himself up more and more to business, with a completeness that was characterized as devotion in commercial circles, and not regarded in the least as suicidal and one form of madness. His body was taxed to the utmost limit of its extraordinary endurance habitually, and occasionally sufficiently far beyond that point to rebel somewhat.

His mind was like his office, a large, busy place, where hardly a thought could enter, much less be entertained, without encountering the challenge, "No Admittance except on Business." It was still more like his office desk, a perfect mass of "pigeon-holes," in which were deposited bills, notes, contracts, mortgages, debentures, certificates, memoranda, calculations without end. With these he lived, and in them moved and had his being. He was now known far beyond the limit of his city, or even State. Every post brought him a pile of begging letters, circulars, proposals to do everything, from paving the streets of Jerusalem to providing the Siamese with the American system of telegraphy. And he had invitations to go here, there, and everywhere, — to California, to Florida, to spend a month in the Adirondacks; to go yachting, shooting, fishing; to join clubs, societies, associations; to become a Mason, Odd Fellow, Good Templar; to become an active or honorary member of all the leading political, military, and civic organizations of the place.

In the local papers he took the place long occupied by Washington's body servant, or, in the rural dis-

tricts, that of the first egg laid on the editor's table that season, or the first bale of cotton sent to market, — he made such a perennially available subject for paragraphs. But for all this he was no more social, gregarious, or diffusive in Philipopolis than he had been in Eureka, and resisted firmly all such attempts to beguile him into other paths than the one he had chosen to walk in. There was really nothing to relieve the strained tension of his mind. The only persons with whom he had anything like intimate relations, outside of his family, were business men like himself, with whom he invariably discussed stock quotations, trade prospects, and kindred subjects. And the only recreation that he gave himself was a very infrequent dinner, given to some eight or ten of those gentlemen, at the best restaurant, where the delicacies of whatever season was out of season were provided, and all the talk was of bonds, shares, dividends, convertibles, drops or rises in the market, puts and calls, bulls and bears.

All the grace and charm of purely social intercourse with clever, kindly, well-bred people was a delight unimagined, even, by him, and as for pictures and music and books, they were sealed fountains of joy for him; the first two had no meaning for him, requiring as they emphatically do the seeing eye and hearing ear, and the last might as well have been written in Sanskrit for any good he got from them. The very thought of traveling was disagreeable to him; the idea of breaking the shell of habit in which he had ossified and roaming about in search of mere amusement seemed to him both pain-

ful and absurd. For a while he was perfectly satisfied with his signal success in his career and the position it gave him. He gloated secretly over his bank account. He calculated that in ten years he would be worth so many more millions. In an idle moment he would draw a check for all his available fortune to see how it looked, and would think, "I can get that cashed in any bank in this State any day that I choose," and would then walk over to the fire and drop the slip of paper on the bed of coals, and watch it shrivel and blacken and blow away, as he leaned smilingly against the mantelshelf. He thoroughly enjoyed the respect and consideration that he had gained in the commercial world.

He could not have explained himself how it came about that, after a few months of self-gratulation and contentment, a germ of discontent sprang up within him and gradually worked its way out until it enveloped him like an atmosphere. It developed in a short while into a Nessus-like, clinging, constant feeling of disappointment and depression. When he was not actively employed, an intolerable sense of *ennui* beset him, and the only antidote to the poisonous fang of this inquietude was the homœopathic one of the hair of the dog. In other words, he was obliged, now, to go on making the money for which he had no longer any particular use with more ardor than ever; and said that in order to do this, he required sea-room. In the local tank in which he found himself, his genius and movements were cramped and limited; he was continually bringing up against its glass sides, through which he could

see his way clearly enough, but could not reach it; and this it was which finally led him to seek the commercial Atlantic of Wall Street, in which the very biggest whales could disport themselves freely, and ruin or be ruined on a magnificent scale.

Like many a powerful and vigorous swimmer, he had breasted the stream with all its adverse currents only to find himself paralyzed by the cramp of disappointment after getting into smooth waters close to shore. He could not account for the blank surprise with which he had arrived at the definite goal of all his ambitions, nor understand that the trouble was that he had made no sort of provision for spending or enjoying the fortune which he had strained every nerve to acquire. He had never thought of it as the means to an end, and that end a life of calm satisfactions, reasonable pleasures, intelligent employment of his mental faculties, beneficent service of his fellow men.

He did not see in the least that, without being a saint, or holding other worldly views, it is still true that riches have no real advantage except in their right use and distribution. The most stupid master mechanic would see the folly of giving the best years of his life to constructing a Corliss engine, and then letting it rust or go to ruin without its ever fulfilling the very object of its creation, thus wasting a mighty force that might have been employed in a thousand different ways. Yet this shrewd, sensible, practical man (as Mr. Withers was generally accounted) never once asked himself, "Why am I making all this money? What am I

going to do with it when I get it? What limit shall I fix to its acquisition in order that I may set about the equally important work of disposing of it well and wisely?" So now the only idea that came to him was that he was not making enough money. "New York is the place for me," he said to his wife. "I wish I had gone straight there from Denton, instead of wasting my time fiddling and diddling along here as I have done."

"I think so, too," replied Mrs. Withers, in a tone of warm assent. "What is the use of living out here in the West, when we can afford to live where we please, and just as we please? I want to go where there is some style and amusement, and where the best society is. Philipopolis is as common as can be, compared with New York. Anybody can get into society *here*." In this contemptuous fashion did Mrs. Withers allow herself to speak of a community that had fully adopted her; and it was perhaps natural that she should have her own opinion of a place that had accepted her without any preliminary apprenticeship or struggle for recognition on her part, such as she had counted on. We value most what we earn, not what is given us, and her easy victory over Mrs. Sutton and "the set" had led her to think scornfully of both, and even to show a certain insolence toward them. The two poles of the vulgar mind and manner are servility and arrogance. In the rotation of the *parvenue* on her axis, one or other of them is constantly being turned toward us.

The sun of prosperity, the sun of Austerlitz, the

sun of self-interest, was the one that this Parsee worshiped, and if that can give out the brightest light, it only follows as a matter of course that somewhere there must be cast the blackest shadows. But there are innumerable shades of this effulgence and gloom, and though Mrs. Withers had for some time sighed for fresh worlds to conquer, she was minded to astonish and delight Philipopolis once more before leaving it forever. She would give a dinner, she determined; people always felt more complimented by being asked to that form of entertainment than any other. It should be the handsomest that had ever been given in the place.

Having settled thus much, she sat down to write thirty invitations and bid what (in somewhat defective but singularly appropriate French) she was in the habit of calling the "cram de la cram of the city" to the feast. On a similar occasion in Eureka, not many years back, she had with infinite pains and care produced a form of social solicitation in which she had wandered in and out of the persons in a versatile fashion that did credit to her ingenuity, at least:

Mrs. Withers requests the pleasure of your company at a party on the 27th ult. If it should rain, I hope you will come any way according to agreement, and not disappoint me.

Mrs. G. W. Withers.

She remembered it now with a pang of mortification, as she wrote out a very different batch of notes in the neat copper-plate hand that she had acquired, and in quite conventional terms.

Tired of being inconspicuous and following the lead of others, she sat for some time, after she had dispatched them, wondering what she could do to give the coming affair the unique rank that she coveted for it; and after a good deal of reflection it came, like all great thoughts, of itself in a kind of inspiration. "I know!" she exclaimed mentally in triumphant delight. "I know! I will give them caviare!" This resolution, it may be said, *en passant*, was but another form of expression for that vein of daring originality which, first showing itself in the "Oysters and Fun" and menu cards of the great Eurekan entertainment, went through as many stages of progressive enlightenment as Mrs. Withers herself, and finally contributed not a little (when duly chastened and tutored by *savoir faire*) to that lady's extraordinary success in society. Now although caviare at present may be, very likely is, one of the principal articles of diet in Philipopolis, at that time it was not only caviare to the general, but to the few. Mrs. Withers's own acquaintance with it dated from a newspaper article that she had read two weeks previously, in which a public dinner in New York, given to a French celebrity, had been described with unctuous attention to detail by a hungry reporter. To New York she sent for it; it came, and eager to know what it was like, she had it opened and, with every expectation of having her palate gratified, tasted it.

It took her quite half an hour to recover from that injudicious act. She was utterly routed and disconcerted for the moment. Was that the deli-

cacy that was to charm the select thirty? Had there not been some mistake? She anxiously inspected the labels and trademarks, and re-read the letter that had come with it. It would not do to poison the guests whom she had only meant to electrify. Could she venture on such an awful experiment? "It is so perfectly abominable and has cost so much, it *must* be good," she argued at last. "Well, it is the thing to have, and it is not my affair if they don't like it. What on the face of the earth *is* it made of? I'll go down to the City Library, and find that out, at once, so I can talk about it. Mrs. Sutton has never heard of it, I know; she'll be astonished!"

The thought of handing on, as it were, her own delusion with its consequent awakening was so amusing to her that she took more interest than ever in the coming entertainment, and prepared to enjoy the sensation she was about to produce, without a thought of the victims of her gastronomic operation, confident that her own position in the matter was impregnable. One precaution she took on the day of the dinner, and that was to give her husband a tablespoonful of caviare before he left home, saying, "There is something perfectly elegant that I got from New York for the dinner, George. Try it; here, with this piece of bread." Thus solicited, Mr. Withers did try it, and the effect on his usually stolid visage was remarkable. "The pit rose at him," as it did at a certain actor on a very different occasion, to mention in a whisper a vulgar and not uncommon experience, and while he was still speech-

less from much emotion, Mrs. Withers, looking on gravely, affected astonishment, that being the line of conduct she had settled on. "Why, what's the matter?" she asked. "Don't you like it? Have you swallowed it the wrong way?"

"What is the —— stuff?" Mr. Withers brought out with difficulty presently, past-participling the obnoxious flavor that still lingered in his mouth after the most energetic efforts to rid himself of it, and staring angrily at his wife. "Is this some fool-joke of yours that you are playing on me, Liz? Because if it is, I don't like it, I can tell you."

"A joke? You must be joking yourself," she replied. "If you don't like it, why can't you say so? *I* think it is splendid, and other people like it, I can tell you. It is considered a great treat, a very great treat, and that is why I bought it."

"You are not going to give that — ugh! to your company, are you?" he asked, with a most expressive grimace and lively incredulity.

"Yes, I am. Of course I am. Why not?" she demanded imperiously.

"Oh, well, no buzzard, that knew what it was, would touch it. But go ahead. I suppose it is *fashionable*," he retorted. "Fashionable people are welcome to it for *me*. Have it if you choose, but don't ask *me* to have any."

As this was precisely the point at which Mrs. Withers wished to arrive, she was not at all displeased or hurt by the last remark, though she walked off to her room with much dignity, to indicate that she had had enough of the conversation. That

evening Mrs. Withers, in a Paris costume, received her guests with immense affability and effusion; in short, her own peculiar cordiality, which had about it the chill brightness of a fire lit for company in a room seldom used. Mr. Withers stoutly resisted all the wiles and arts by which she had striven to induce him to wear evening-dress, blandishments that had ended in a quarrel between them.

He wandered into the drawing-room at the last moment, looking as much of a stranger there as possible, — indeed, like a man who had got into the wrong house by mistake; seeing which, his wife called out to him to come and speak to some lady near her, and raged inwardly over his coat and want of polish. He complied, and shook hands with much limpness with all the ladies in that neighborhood, ducked in awkward recognition to the other members of the company, and wandered away again. This time he brought up at the foot of the room, where he suddenly dropped into a chair near two men who had drifted there, and, running his hands deep in his pockets, began to talk in the engaging and light-hearted strain suitable to a festive occasion; that is, he got off no less than three remarks (at long intervals) of the driest and dullest description, frowning all the while and paying little heed to the answers he got, after which he wandered out into the hall again, where he sat down on a chair, and rubbed his chin, and wished devoutly that the evening which had just begun was over.

He could hear the loud hum of talk from the company he had left, and glanced upstairs once or

twice, hoping that Mary would come down. He could see his wife through the open door. "She 's all right. She 's in her element," he thought, as he watched her. "Who would think, to look at her and to hear her talk, that she had ever been a milliner? I guess she has cost me every cent of fifteen thousand just as she stands. At six per cent" — Mr. Withers's calculations were cut short by hearing a sound of folding-doors sliding back; he hastily returned to the drawing-room, and was told by his wife that he was to take in Mrs. Sutton, because she was "such a perfectly delightful woman that even if the dinner was a complete failure, he would never know it, and she would escape a scolding for her bad management."

This was said in Mrs. Sutton's hearing, of course, and Mrs. Withers added mysteriously, as the pair were about to move off, "There is one thing that *you* will enjoy, — I got it especially for you, my dear Mrs. Sutton, — *a very fine* variety, I was told, of caviare, which I am sure I 've heard you say you were fond of." In the half hour that had preceded dinner, Mrs. Withers had advertised this feature of her repast in her best style and a great variety of ways. To a spruce, alert young naval officer she put it, "We are shockingly late, are n't we? Oh, the cooks, the cooks! Fortunately the caviare can't spoil. It will not be as good as that you have eaten abroad, I fear, but mind! I rely on your telling me whether it is good or not. If it is n't, I won't get any more from Talford & Mullin."

To an inane young woman who was asked every-

where, and held a most enviable position of unassailable precedent and prerogative that must have been highly gratifying in a country in which aristocratic institutions have been notoriously abolished, — a young woman of whom it was always said that she was "the great-niece of Mrs. Ex-Governor Dillingsworth," and who was not remarkable for anything whatever except her lineage, Mrs. Withers said, "I don't call myself a judge of caviare, but if what I am going to give you to-day is n't quite as good as any that you have eaten even at your uncle's, the governor's, table, I have been dreadfully imposed upon, that 's all." To Judge Sutton it was, "You live so elegantly and are such a *goremand*, judge, that I don't know how you will make out at our simple meal; but *one* thing I *can* recommend, and that is the caviare. It is a particularly delicious kind, made of the roes of the sterlet; *you* know it, of course! Until lately it was reserved for the use of the Russian Imperial Family, but small quantities are being exported now, — Talford of New York's special agent secured some lately."

Not in vain had artless Mrs. Withers studied the ways of the world. To a dozen persons at least she sang with appropriate variations this simple lay. And as for the "simple meal," it was as elaborate as she knew how to make it, and gave striking evidence of the change that had come over her since the days of her famous farewell to Eureka and the Denton housewarming. At every stage of the ascending series of social planes, she had developed scientifically with her rise, as only women can do,

and no women with the rapidity or thorough adaptability to conditions the most novel and complex that is shown by the *Américaine*. The wines, the flowers, the viands, the arrangement of the table, were most refined and tasteful, if over-elaborate, and the handsome hostess who presided over the feast did not seem at all misplaced. When the two servants, whom Mrs. Withers called her "colored waiter-men," came up from the Tartarus of the basement offices, dark and shining and important, bearing two little trays, which were presented to each guest in turn, with the due allowance of napkin and white cotton gloves, Mrs. Withers exclaiming, "Ah! here is our appetizer! A soupçong of caviare, Colonel Black, is the best possible introduction from a dinner to a diner-out," servers and served alike felt that a solemn moment in their lives had come.

Three people present were immediately equal to the occasion, and the others, not liking to make a perceptible pause, became extremely attentive to the right or left hand neighbor until certain preliminaries were settled, — how much they were expected to take, and how it was to be eaten. The arrangement was like the old Israelitish one for war, the company being divided into bands with its captains of tens. The lieutenant gallantly gave his example at once, and went into action with a large slice of bread and a large spoonful of caviare. Twelve people above him and below him took large slices of bread and large spoonfuls of caviare. Dr. Dove, a mild man of mournful aspect, who was very generally employed because he had "studied

his profession in Paris," — nobody seeming to consider it at all important whether he had learned anything there or not, — Dr. Dove abstemiously chose a tiny bit of bread and a microscopic morsel of caviare. Eight people in his neighborhood behaved as though he had given them not so much a model of conduct as a valuable prescription, and took, to a man, tiny bits of bread and microscopic morsels of caviare.

The third hero of the evening was a heroine, — a stout lady, who was very generally and properly commiserated as "reduced," although this phrase was certainly only partly applicable to a woman whose fleshly gains ought to have been set over against her worldly losses; a lady who had once given good dinners of her own, and was now perfectly willing to eat those of other people; a lady who had decided views about a great many things, — small things which she may have thought could not take care of themselves, and required to be sternly insisted upon, protected, enforced; a lady who thought that *the* way, the only proper, right, permissible, conceivable way to eat caviare was with mustard; who could not endure to see it so much as looked at in any other light than that of mustard, or approached in any other spirit than a spirit of proper obedience to her views. "You have crackers, have n't you?" she said *sotto voce* to the servant in attendance. "Bring some, and the mustard." As soon as her commands were obeyed, she helped herself to two crackers, a teaspoonful of mustard and the same quantity of caviare, and then, accus-

tomed to making up the minds of her acquaintances, said, or rather commanded, "Take it with mustard, and plenty of it," and eagerly passed that condiment to her neighbors. Nine of them took their caviare to order, with only such variations in the number of crackers and quantity of mustard as suggested themselves to timid guests who did not wish their conformity to have a slavish air of ignorant agreement with valuable precedent.

The only remaining *convive* was an absent-minded professor of mathematics in the local college, who, after blinking carelessly at the proffered dainties, in response to a respectful nudge from the Mercury offering them, curtly declined the course altogether. And now came the supreme moment of actual martyrdom, a moment short as any other in an hour, as we arbitrarily reckon time, but long remembered by some persons. It was not "an agony in Five Fitts" like the "Hunting of the Snark," but five fits in one agony for the provincial palate, for the caviare was horribly stale, in addition to its own peculiarity of taste. Any artist having in mind a picture of Banquo's Ghost, or the banquet in "Lucrezia Borgia," would certainly have got a valuable study of expression in the faces at that table for a moment. Then Mrs. Withers's voice was heard sweetly declaring, "Delicious stuff, is n't it? I must say so, even at my own table," as she heroically disposed of her share. "Delightfully *fresh*," replied Mrs. Sutton, firmly subduing the rebellious, convulsive movement of her throat, her face bearing traces of the struggle to catch the Imperial flavor that

ought to have charmed every Republican palate. "Very nice," "So nice," "Extremely good," was now heard from a number of other ladies on both sides of the table.

The gentlemen were ominously silent. The lieutenant took one mouthful only of what was before him. Dr. Dove drank a glass of sherry with some haste for a person of tranquil manners. Colonel Black grew purple and apoplectic, and the professor was looking at him anxiously, when he suddenly yielded to an irresistible impulse, and bolted from his seat out on the gallery upon which the French windows opened. Everybody stared after him, and then at him when he returned an instant later, looking as though he had been indulging privately in a violent fit of weeping. "Excuse me" — he began, reseating himself, and nervously spreading and re-spreading his napkin across his knees.

"I am not surprised. I think" — began Mr. Withers.

"Oh! don't mind. I am always choking myself over something," said Mrs. Withers, all affable concern. "Only I am so sorry. It is so disagreeable to get anything in the windpipe;" and under cover of the general outburst of small talk that followed the interruption, all going to show how easy it was to choke one's self to death, even, Dr. Dove unobtrusively pushed a decanter toward the colonel, who took something more than the hint, and the great crisis was over. Luxuries and delicacies a many, familiar and acceptable, followed in long and over-elaborate order, and, later, an evening of whist, and

punch, and much convivial expansion and enjoyment. But if the guests had reckoned without their hostess on this occasion, she had not made that mistake. The entertainment over, it was unanimously voted the most elegant that had ever been given in that city, and what gave it that hall-mark and guinea stamp was the caviare.

"I told you not to have that —— dish on the table," Mr. Withers complained to his wife next day. "I was so ashamed I did n't know which way to look. It was a perfect shame to ask anybody to eat such stuff. It completely spoilt your dinner. I wonder at you, Liz."

"Much you know about it," retorted his wife. "It *made* my dinner. Just you wait till I get to New York, — that 's all. You 'll see. You know all about business, — well ; it 's my business to know about society, and there ain't anything going to stop me, — I 'm going to the very top of the ladder. I 'm going to be a leader, George."

"You can't do it, Liz. They 've been too long in the business there, and can put up too wide a margin. You 'll get busted, if you fly too high, there among the bulls. What do you want to do it for, any way? If you 'll take my advice, you 'll let well enough alone. Have n't you got all you want?" asked Mr. Withers.

"Are *you* afraid of the bulls there?" she demanded. "Are you going to take a back seat and look on, for fear of getting 'busted,' as you call it? You know you are just aching to get on that floor. You know *you* mean to be first, if it takes every cent

you 've got. Well, so do I; so don't you preach at me."

"New York ain't Philipopolis," remarked Mr. Withers sententiously. "How are you going to do it?"

"You take me there, that 's all you 've got to do. I 'll find a way," responded his wife. "I 'll *make* a way."

She tossed her handsome head, as she spoke; and he, half sympathizing, half disapproving, said: "I guess that means that I 'll have to cash a good many checks, — don't it? And money won't do it, maybe?"

"Then I 'll find out what will," she said, and set her lips firmly. "Money *will* do it, when I find out what it is."

Mr. Withers took a turn up and down the room, and then added awkwardly: "I wish you liked staying in your own home and looking after the children and all that, like some women, Liz," — suddenly discovered that he "must go to the orfus," and was off before she could reply.

Mr. Withers was quite right about one thing. He did have to cash a good many checks before he got his family out of Philipopolis and established in New York. But after he had reached a certain point in his fortunes, he had never been a man to begrudge that kind of expenditure; and he made no objection when Mrs. Withers, after staying for a month at a hotel, and making inquiries and studying the field of battle, informed him that she had "found just the house she wanted on Fifth Avenue." He bought it for her, and made no objection

to the price either, beyond declaring it to be "a stiff one." He stared when what Mr. Mantilini would have called the "demnition total," in the way of bills for furnishing it, came in; but he paid them, with a "Well, Liz, you *are* bent on splurging and cutting a figure."

Having thrown up her earthworks and massed her forces, Mrs. Withers moved in and on society. She confidently expected that there would be some demonstration along the skirmish line immediately, and that a general engagement would follow. She so admired her own fine house, was so conscious of her new splendors of every kind, that she could not imagine that beyond a "Who has bought the Wilford house?" that was abundantly answered by "Oh, *I* don't know; some rich people from the West, — nobodies I hear," society took no interest in her or hers whatever. She was still provincial, and did not know that at Newcastle coals are not apt to be regarded as black diamonds.

She took a pew in two fashionable churches, and attended the services regularly, but with no other effect than to bore herself prodigiously. She tried giving dinners to the few people whom she met, business acquaintances of her husband's, and soon said of these entertainments that they were "no use." She frequented places of public amusement, and saw the people whom she wished to know, and spent most of her time in devising schemes for inserting the entering wedge that should open up a path for her. She bought quantities of toilettes, which she lamented that no one saw. She drove about in a

state of solitary splendor, and invented errands for herself and the coachman in the fashionable parts of town, and was always fearing that he only pretended to be deceived by these ruses. She arrayed herself every evening for dinner, and sat upright on her yellow satin sofa, in a state of stiff discomfort until eleven o'clock, determined to do the correct thing and keep fashionable hours. She no longer talked of her "waiter-men," but of her butler and footmen, or rather "my first man," "my second man."

She wandered about her reception-rooms like a lost Peri, and stared disconsolately and furtively out of her windows up the street, down the street, across the street, longing, waiting, hoping, for the visits and visitors that never came. She lost her temper often over the not very cheerful process, and thought in strong language, "What the dickens"-ing and "What the mischief"-ing, it must be owned, as she tried to see what it meant, and decide what she should do. A weaker woman would have wept, or wailed, or packed up and gone back to Philipopolis. Mrs. Withers set her teeth. "Damn them all!" she said one day, in a sudden transport of fury, "I will know them! *I will!*"

With Mr. Withers it had been different. He had not been a month in "the street" before its pulse began to bound under the touch of his cunning hand. The street was not aristocratic, or curious, or unpleasant, and soon there were few men in it who would not only have been delighted to make his acquaintance, but who would not have been precious glad to have had the benefit of his opinions, confi-

dences, hints, if they could only have believed his simplest statements about shares. His keen eyes, his impassive face, his taciturn manner, combined with his successful speculations and evident knowledge of affairs, made a great impression, and it soon became clear to bulls and bears alike that here was a foeman worthy of their steel.

As for him, he experienced a vital delight again in exercising his old craftiness, boldness, inspirations; in pitting his strength and wits and nerve against other men of strength, wit, nerve; in beating at a game that had grown insipid, he now believed, because of too frequent and easy victories. He enjoyed a first heavy loss, the result of over confidence in himself, as he had not done any gain for a long while; and promptly retrieved it by a *coup* that was brilliant, masterly, that set all the tongues and prophetic heads in the Exchange wagging, and caused the money article editor on all the great dailies to wax eloquent; so that instead of every *other* man on the morning trains seizing the paper and turning to that column as if he expected to find there his own reprieve from hanging, as is usually the case, *every* man seemed to be engaged upon it, or rather to be engaged in devouring it. Everybody saw in it another serpent of Aaron swallowing every lesser creeping thing with delightful ease, and especially rejoiced that "old This" or "That" had "at last met his match."

It was this success, indeed (the rumor of which naturally reached Mrs. Withers's ears), that at last induced that lady to make another assault on the

citadel of society, which still gave no sign of being so much as aware of her existence. They had been living in New York for two years now, she reflected, and there was nothing accomplished, nothing done. The greatest generals, from Cæsar to Wellington, have been fallible, and have made mistakes. Mrs. Withers made a mistake. She determined to give a ball. Now a ball is precisely the one form of entertainment that no *parvenue* can possibly hope to carry to a successful issue. It requires an established position, a long visiting-list, gifts, graces, advantages a many, to produce that noble social effect, and set a great number of belles, beaux, beauties, and notabilities whirling in a merry-go-round for several hours, with pleasure to themselves and to the lookers-on in Vienna.

Mrs. Withers asked everybody that she knew to bring everybody that they knew. She secured three great essentials for a good ball in the supper, music, and lights, which were of the best, and generously provided. Her own toilette was magnificent. But, all the same, the affair was a ghastly failure. The few people who represented the "nobility and gentry" of effete despotisms herded together as if to separate were to be lost, and held themselves far more coldly and haughtily aloof than if they had been really the royal personages that they secretly had in mind, or seemed to have, so royal was their condescension. The rank and file were quite paralyzed by it, and by no means at ease; and, try as she would, Mrs. Withers could not fuse these elements into a harmonious and mirthful whole. Her hard, handsome

face flushed a deeper and deeper red as the evening wore on, and at last her anger and mortification and disgust found vent as follows: Certain young men of fashion who, out of curiosity chiefly, had dropped in for an hour *en route* to the great Buddicombe ball (which was also on that night), had massed themselves in a doorway. There they stood, provokingly cool, composed, well dressed, looking on, and only looking on.

Mrs. Withers approached one, and asked if he were not Prince Charming. He admitted the soft impeachment. Would he dance? "No, thanks, it was too hot." Would he go in the supper-room and take an ice? "No, thanks, it was too cold." Would he be introduced to any of the partnerless girls whose faces were saying, "He cometh not: I would I were in bed," so plainly? "No, thanks, he knew everybody." All the other men flocking with him felt as he did, and would not dance, or eat, and "knew more people than they could be civil to already," or slipped away into other corners to escape her. It was very rude of them, and as Mrs. Withers listened, her already aggravated temper could no longer bear the constraint put upon it. She actually stamped her foot at young Van Noodle, the most blonde and beautiful and inane of them all, and demanded one thing of him, of them all, in an inclusive flash of her angry eyes, — "What the devil did you come here for, then? Just tell me that."

There was a hearty laugh over this unexpected honest outburst, and the greatest *élégant* of them all promptly declared that she was "quite right," and

begged her pardon, and declared his willingness to be introduced to any girl except "the fat one in pink opposite," and went off and danced dutifully for quite an hour.

When the last carriage had rolled away, though, and the sleepy Teutons had carried off their instruments in green baize bags, that bulged in mysterious places, giving the most remarkable effects, Mrs. Withers flung herself on the nearest sofa in a most tragic abandonment of despair, crying out, "They were all laughing at me! They did n't enjoy themselves at all! They despised the whole thing. The hateful, stuck-up" — Here her rage choked her, and she actually, for almost the first and last time in her whole life, went off into a violent fit of hysterics. For several days she was perfectly inconsolable and miserable. And then she revolted. She was not used to failure. She determined with a deep, deadly sort of resolution, mock-tragic to think of, dark, but quite real to her, to wait, to carry that stone in her pocket, to bide her time, to be revenged on the society, and the set that had wounded her in her tenderest ambitions and hopes.

She diligently studied the "Society News" and papers for about two weeks after this, and came to a conclusion. It was that all she needed was to be properly advertised, in order to go down the throat of society like the bolus that she daily saw heralded as "world-wide in its reputation" and "taken by everybody." And so it came about that the editors of certain "Society Journals" received notes in an unformed feminine handwriting, inclosing other

notes with which no fault could be found whatever, and notices that (after being duly doctored by a young gentleman in charge of that department of the paper) chronicled and described with fulsome comprehensiveness and adulation the establishment of "Mr. G. Washington-Withers in a palatial Fifth Avenue residence;" the amount paid for it; gave a sketch of the owner; a swelling account of his fortune, with an earnest, almost prayerful injunction to other men to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the same, and go and do likewise; an announcement that his wife sprang from one of the oldest and most influential families in the State of Missouri.

It did seem a sad pity sometimes to the young gentleman behind the scenes, who was of a somewhat cynical and waggish turn of mind, that the mystic word "ad" could not be added to these skillfully constructed and ingenious paragraphs, though it was there in invisible ink for more eyes than his. But Mrs. Withers was more than content with them. She read them over and over again, with a grave, intent face, spreading out the sheet with hands bejeweled from knuckle to joint, and remarking with admiration the professional touch of the regularly employed, to whom she had at last confided the task of making her "well known" and "a leader." Mr. Withers read them too, but they awakened very different feelings in his breast. The hyphen in his name was a source of extreme annoyance to him. He testily declared it to be "derned foolishness," and frowned darkly as his eye went down the column. He had "half a mind to put on his hat and

go down there." He asked scornfully who had ever heard of a hyphen in Wall Street, and declared it would seriously injure him in business. Knowing that he had married a milliner, he did not at all appreciate the poetically delicate touch of inspired snobbishness by which his wife was made to "spring," like a Guelph or Ghibelline, or Minerva from the head of Jove, from "one of the oldest families in Missouri," instead of coming "of poor but respectable" folk, in the usual prosaic fashion.

It was worse than lost upon him. He struck the paper and cried out, "What a whopper, Liz!" and delicately added: "You was n't anything of the sort; you had nothing when you married me. I 've put you where you are!" Catching a glimpse of her face, which she could not make quite unconscious of her share in the transaction, he said, "Do you know anything about this?" whereupon she, being cornered, told a Sapphira, and protested and vowed that it was all "those ridiculous reporters," which caused those ornaments of the press to come in for considerably more abuse than they deserved. "I would n't have Nokes see that hyphen for fifty dollars," declared Mr. Withers. "I 'm ashamed to go down there, — Washington-Withers, indeed!" Society, or a section of society, read them too, and made a few languidly impertinent comments and inquiries, but did not leave its card at the door of the "palatial residence."

If there had been "a chiel amang them takin' notes," he might have wondered that the interests of the public should be served, as of course they must be, by the publication of a perfect wealth of

details about purely personal and private affairs; at the necessity certain papers seemed to be under of serving the Washington-Withers up in nearly every issue, most unselfishly devoting untold space to their comings, goings, dress, fortune, guests, entertainments, the number of the shoe that Mrs. Withers wore, the pattern of Mr. Withers's trousers, the illness of Miss Withers's pug.

When it became perfectly clear to Mrs. Withers that wear what shoe she might, printer's ink could not be relied upon to effect her purpose, and would never enable her to set foot in certain houses, she was almost in despair for a few hours. She rallied, however, and one day got what she felt to be an inspiration as she was reading the very papers that had failed to serve her purpose. "I know!" she exclaimed. "What a goose I 've been not to see it before! I have n't been abroad!" The Americans who had lived there all their lives (if these publications were to be trusted) outranked all other Americans. Fourteen years of Europe was a sort of patent of nobility, and equal to a cycle of America; seven years a kind of Portuguese knighthood; three years a barely respectable period of quarantine, insuring society against catching the most virulent type of the spread-eagle malady; not to have been at all, utterly unpardonable, not to say criminal.

Two weeks later Mrs. Withers announced her fixed intention of going abroad to educate her "dear girls," who, nothing loath, were taken away from Miss Piper's school; and in spite of Mr. Withers's disapproval of the whole scheme, his wife had her way.

CHAPTER VIII

Abroad, then, Mrs. Withers went, as advertised, and lost no time in carrying out her views and plans for her children and herself. For them she procured a small army of tutors, governesses, masters, men-servants, and maid-servants; but finding that this arrangement was more expensive than satisfactory, so far as they were concerned, and that it did not include her own education, which was a matter of even greater importance, she altered it. She put her daughters at a school of much fashionable repute in Brussels, for three months. At the end of that time she happened to see in Galignani that a Bourbon Princess had just been sent to the Sisters of the Sacré Cœur in Paris.

In twenty-four hours she was on her way there with the two girls, who could not imagine why they had been so suddenly removed from the Pensionnat Mortier, after a spirited scene with Mlle. Mortier, who was very much vexed to lose such pupils, and only partially consoled by being paid for a whole term to come. She established herself near them in a French family, engaged teachers for herself, plunged headlong into all sorts of studies, — German, French, music, painting, for every spare hour of the day an accomplishment of some kind. Never did a girl at any school work half so hard as this deter-

mined matron. She sat down before the French tongue, and regularly besieged it.

She wrote exercises and verbs and notes all the morning, she walked with Mlle. Falconier in the afternoon, she talked to the family at all hours, and kept a memorandum-book in her pocket in which to note idioms, a phrase-book for odd half hours, and a novel in the carriage, the Parisian papers on her dressing-table, and a French almanac on her writing-table. She went to the theatres on week days, heard sermons in that tongue on Sundays, and with great condescension accepted invitations to all the mild festivities that came in her way, as a pro-temporaneous member of the Falconier family, that she might practice what she had learned, and add to her vocabulary. She slept in French, that is to say with "Corinne" under her pillow, and rose with it in the morning, when her French maid appeared with her chocolate. In shops, in museums, in the Louvre, sight-seeing, walking, driving, whatever she did, wherever she went, she was still engaged in improving herself in every respect.

The ways, works, manners, amusements, of the great world, the dress and address, liveries, appurtenances, luxuries, and elegancies, hotels, titles, alliances, of Vanity Fair, and as much more as current gossip and her old allies, the papers, could reveal, were subjects of a consuming interest and endless meditation with her. The rank materialism and brilliant worldliness of the environment affected her powerfully, and appealed to the whole woman, as Paris does supremely to all women of the *grisette*

type, whether clad in cotton or velvet. She felt that her foot was on her native heath, and scented power, dominion, pleasure, with every breath, at every turn. It was wonderful to see how she took the color of her surroundings, and girdled the world like another Puck as she took its measure, and learned or divined how much is given and forgiven to millionaires, how little is demanded from them. "What do I want with the literature of the French language?" she said impatiently to her master, an enthusiastic little man, with a great love for all literatures, a frenzied admiration of his own. "I can't be wasting my time on it."

"Not read Racine, — *mais*, madame, read you not *le divin* Shakespeare? The literature is alone the language, see you," he exclaimed, his brows working tragically over such a situation.

"Well, I can't help it, if it is," replied Mrs. Withers. "I want to be able to talk to Lefort about my dresses, and to people in the shops, and in society, and everywhere. What do I want with Racine?" Hecuba was nothing to her, nor she to Hecuba, and she would none of it. But of conversation she could not have enough, and she made him give her models for notes of invitation, condolence, regrets, acceptances, which she copied and kept for reference. On one of her visits to the convent, Mary chanced to show her the *cahier* of the princess, containing the dictation of the day; and what did she do but whip out her pencil, and copy a page of it (also for reference), and make it the basis of a radical reformation of her own handwriting.

It will be seen that if she did not trouble herself about the literature of France, it was only because it seemed to her to have no direct practical bearing on her future life as a woman of fashion. French fashions, French bonbons, French cooks and maids were essential, but of Béranger it was quite enough to know that he was a French poet, and, only as a precaution, in case of awkward situations arising, to fix a certain amount of general and superficial information in mind in order to pass society's very civil service examination. When she had got good working use of the tongue by the Falconier arrangement, she removed to a superb suite of apartments just vacated by the Queen of Holland, and gave herself the benefit of all that she had learned in some other directions.

Even in that luxurious capital, in which many strangers with large fortunes are always to be found vying with the Parisians and each other in display, people were soon asking who the handsome woman was who was to be seen daily driving in the Bois, at the opera, the races, everywhere, whose toilettes were so numerous and elegant, whose liveries had been declared by the English Minister, Lord Alfred Strongbow, to be those of the Duke of Norfolk. Mrs. Withers's education was not yet complete, alas! and this last accusation was only too well founded. When she first decided to set up her carriage and liveries and a crest, she had gone to a local American institution with every facility, if no authority, for manufacturing these distinguishing marks of great families; from a set of highly colored plates

she had chosen one that pleased her, and, after having it duly emblazoned on parchment, had framed it and hung it up in her drawing-room. She now proceeded to make a liberal use of it in other ways. She gave the Parisian tradesmen *carte blanche*, and the result was that in pipe-clay, housings, trappings, paint, and upholstery, as well as in horse and human flesh, her turnout was a match for that of Señor Don Antonio Villanuevo Carabal Bustamente, of Chili, who was quite the idol of the hour in Paris, and reported to be richer than the Rothschilds. Money could do no more.

For six months Mrs. Withers reveled in this result of her enterprise. Then the dear friend who is with us all always, the world over, felt it her "duty" to repeat Lord Strongbow's remark. Mrs. Withers turned red and then pale under it, but said very little to the dear friend that could be repeated elsewhere. It was like her to concede the point, at once, in her own mind. Lord Strongbow must know, and she now recalled the fact that several Englishmen had looked with marked interest, and something that she now saw to be surprise, though she had then translated it as admiration, at her turnout as they passed her in the Bois. It had been always Englishmen, she remembered, with a pang of angry disgust. The French people of her acquaintance, she reflected, either did not know or did not care about such things. Indeed, she might have sported Mephistopheles's colors for aught that Paris cared, and the people of her set neither knew nor cared. The Norfolk liveries were not as familiar

in the Bois as in Hyde Park, where she might as well have sported the Royal ones, and she had been gratified by the compliments paid her upon the general perfection and elegance of the *ensemble.* But to have begun by making such an egregious blunder was such an acute mortification to her that she kept her room for three days, and seriously thought for half an hour of giving up the battle.

It was at this time that she sent her son off to Germany with his tutor to be coached for Heidelberg; and as he was the one creature whom she loved, idolatrously, selfishly, but still sincerely, she even thought of going with him, and remaining quietly near him until he should be grown and educated. A stronger passion, however, was at work, and promptly negatived the proposition; and though in after days she often wished that she had yielded to the impulse, she let the boy go off to live among strangers with a stranger, and learn what he might as well as what he must. The two circumstances so depressed her that she even lost interest for a time in the stream of people who were awaiting her beck, nod, decision, about a great many matters, — her hair-dresser, milliner, modiste, jeweler, — a long train of them, coming and going, and awaiting her pleasure or convenience in antechambers, and so eager to get and keep her custom that two of them actually came to blows over it, and got into the courts and newspapers.

All the rest were in despair over madame's *migraine*, and there is no expressing their disgust when she suddenly left Paris for London. She was

ashamed to show her face in the Bois, and was tired of stopping indoors, for one thing, and for another she had business there. Her recent experience had stifled her heraldic yearnings for a time, during which she got rid of all traces of her mishap, and learned how much easier it is to buy a palace completely furnished, down to the guests, than to sell a paper of pins in Paris, and had to sacrifice, not only her cherished liveries, but her landau and thoroughbreds. On reflection she felt that life without liveries of some sort was not worth living, and this time there should be no mistake. They should be her own, beyond all peradventure and questionings and impertinence, if there was any virtue in shekels, and parchment, and the English Herald's College.

So to London she went, and so adroit was she, so liberal with her guineas, and unexacting in her demands, and generously ready to adopt everything, provided "nobody could say anything," that in a few weeks she had carried her point. Mr. Washington-Withers, without the least effort on his own part, sitting comfortably in his office in Wall Street, thousands of miles away, unconscious of his honors and glories, was traced through the De Hertburn Wessyngtons back to Charlemagne, where the learned clerk sat down and fanned himself, metaphorically, exhausted by his labors, before again taking up the thread, and following it patiently until he had triumphantly landed Mr. Washington-Withers in the Ark. This done, Mrs. Withers studied the social life of London in all its public

manifestations, as she had done that of Paris. The Serpentine, the Opera, the races, balls, and bazaars got up for charities, gave her opportunities of a certain kind, and, limited as these were, she made the most of them.

Now that she had a crest of her very own, it had of course to be put to good account; and no longer forced to lay piratical hands on that of any "gilded duke or belted earl," she was only eager to know how to employ it. But it was such a fascinating possession that although she made resolutions about using it in a severely correct way, she ended by having it emblazoned on almost everything she possessed. She even had it worked in full with their "arms" into a fire-screen (in crewels), where it presented very much the general effect of the Royal Standard. She bore this off the field with her back to the Continent, where she set it up; that is, she took a handsome villa at Cannes. She now set up a half-dozen carriages, and added English flunkeys that might have been coveted by either Lord Strongbow or his Grace of Norfolk, so ineffable were they in their haughty grace, and so peerless in the matter of wigs and calves.

Too clever by far and too good a general not to know the importance of keeping open her communications, she contrived to carry on the briskest sort of correspondence with her husband, to keep him in excellent humor and herself with an almost limitless bank account. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that she began at last to make headway. Society at Cannes was off its guard, as it were, away

from home, and consequently prepared to take some risks, — frankly selfish in its wish to be amused. It extended two fingers. Mrs. Withers, the astute, let them drop, and looked the other way. That style of salutation was all very well in George the Fourth's reign, and quite the fashion, but in Victoria's it meant patronage, and she did not mean to be patronized. Society could not hold out, shook hands warmly, and finally fell upon her neck. "James" and "John Thomas" were almost buried alive under the pasteboards of the titled (dukes, barons, marquises, counts, to a man almost), with their feminine belongings. And Mrs. Withers was secretly jubilant over the effect produced by a stroke of genius, but betrayed no elation. Hers was a Roman genius, and fighting and governing came naturally to her.

Again she developed with her rise, and held what she had gained, lengthened her cords, strengthened her stakes. Maréchal La Tour raffoled about her to everybody, and pronounced her the one thing she was not, had never been, and never would be, *très spirituelle*. A handsome woman easily persuades the sons of Mars that she is everything that is charming. Madame la Baronne d'Abzac promptly undertook to convert her to Roman Catholicism, and seemed always on the point of succeeding, for Mrs. Withers went with her to mass, gave liberally to all the charities she recommended, read the books she gave her, listened with more than patient interest to her arguments. There was never a more hopeful case. But then, Madame la Baronne belonged to

the *ancien régime*, and was a valuable ally in this world as well as guide to the next. Sir Michael and Lady O'Rourke, Irish exiles, highly connected in France, took to inquiring very particularly about the ages, tastes, tempers, of the Withers girls, and with engaging *finesse* and frankness went on to say that they had three sons, who must either "marry money or starve."

In short, many persons for many reasons found it worth their while to cultivate Mrs. Withers, and she for one, with her own ends always in view, met them all quite half way, so that soon she was received and welcomed everywhere. Society, willing to justify itself, even troubled itself to account for this fact on various grounds, — her husband's great wealth, her beauty, her benevolence in sending M. le Maire a check for the poor regularly every month, nor stopped there. History not being their strong point, American history at least, the Washington prefix was cited as proof positive that Mr. Withers was a lineal descendant of the *pater patriæ*. This was a pleasing fiction widely circulated and quite generally believed, a bit of Mrs. Withers's best mosaic work, — here a word, there a nod, nowhere direct affirmation, perhaps the meanest of all forms of falsehood, since it reaps all the advantages and runs none of the risks of the lie circumstantial.

Matters were at this stage when, as it chanced, the King of Siam and suite and the military hero of the hour in Europe, Field Marshal von Funfteuffel, came to the place for a few weeks' sojourn. No sooner did Mrs. Withers read of their arrival

than an idea struck her right in the middle of her forehead, with such force that with all her boldness and all her confidence even she gasped under it and almost faltered. Three days later, however, the King of Siam was asked to meet the Field Marshal *chez* Madame Withers, and accepted with *empressement*. The Field Marshal, being invited to meet the King, could do no less than accept, also, with becoming alacrity. And all Cannes, being politely summoned to meet his Majesty the King of Siam and Field Marshal von Funfteuffel, likewise expressed its entire willingness to have that honor and pleasure. As for Mrs. Withers, she went to Paris, and Paris came to Cannes in the shape of decorations, upholsterers, and the like, and the result was a most brilliant and entirely successful *fête champêtre*.

That settled the question. Society could not hold out. It shook hands warmly, and finally fell upon the neck of "*la charmante* Mme. Vashinton-Videres;" could not say enough of the taste, the magnificence, the fabulous cost of her *fête*. The deed was done, and Mrs. Withers entitled to write *arrivée* henceforth after her name.

Her children joined her at Cannes when their holidays came around, and she then traveled about with them in great style. The "American Empress" in Chicago announced the fact as follows: "Mrs. Washington-Withers has left Cannes for Rome, where she will remain until after Easter, and where, it is rumored, she will be accorded a special audience by the Pope." This paragraph was neatly

sandwiched between two others: "The Queen of Greece, who has also been at Cannes for the past three months, is going to Egypt, where she will be joined by her royal consort," and "The Marquis of Bute is planting a new variety of mangel-wurzel on his estates, said to be of the most superior nutritive quality, and likely to prove extremely valuable to the British farmer."

Mrs. Withers, unlike the British farmer, was not in straits. She spent money like water, and thoroughly enjoyed being mistaken everywhere for a person of the highest distinction and fashion, in consequence. Wherever she went, she occupied the quarters reserved for and assigned to Princekins and Royalties and High Mightinesses, and was never better pleased than when she had an obsequious landlord and about a dozen servants, napkin in hand and eyes steadily directed toward the chance of transferring money from the wrong to the right pockets, fluttering about her, eager to catch, swift to obey, "the commands of madame." It delighted her to hear the white-capped maids and *bonnes* gossiping about her in the hotel corridors or courtyard as *énormément riche*, — *plus riche que la plupart des reines*, or making way for her respectfully as she passed. She could have recruited an army of servants wherever she halted, large as her train already was, had she desired to do so, so anxious were Marie and Alphonse, and Hans and Gretchen, and Rosa and Giuseppe, and Pancha and Juan, and all the tribe of serving-men and serving-women, to enter a service so evidently distinguished and probably profitable.

And her satisfaction was unmeasured when she saw how her wealth was reflected in every creature that she met, from the beggars, who scented her whereabouts with unerring instinct and quarreled in her very presence for her favor, to the alert attention that good-breeding alone prevented from being a stare, which greeted her entrance into all public places in which the "personages" who were not mere persons were congregated. The importance, the deference, the publicity of it, all was as honey in the honeycomb to her, and from Dan to Beersheba she found nothing barren, for all gave back, as in a mirror, the image of the great Mrs. Washington-Withers. She felt as though she could never tire of one feature of Roman ritual at least, — incense, and the more Catholic the observance, the better she was pleased.

Thanks to the boundless indulgence of the American husband, she grew daily more luxurious; a more dainty and splendid creature than she became within four years could not have been found in all the European purple of hereditary pomp. She could almost have died like a rose of aromatic pain when subjected to the least annoyance or discomfort, some such terrible hardship as a failure to get her perfumed bran-bath, say, in some out-of-the-way Swiss village. Like the princess of the fairy tale, she would have lain awake all night and been bruised black and blue by a single pea lodged under forty feather-beds. She resembled nothing so much as the beautiful colors that rise to the surface from a pool of tar, shimmering and sparkling in iridescent tints that

seem borrowed from the sky above and give no hint of their humble origin.

A gentlewoman she was not, and never could be, but a capital imitation of a fine lady. She easily imposed herself as such upon all foreigners and not a few Americans. Little, sometimes great strips of the veneer peeled off, of course, now and then, and showed the coarse grain of the wood beneath, but this is a charitable world when it is not a most uncharitable one, and somehow these trifling defects were either not seen, or passed over in silence. The rays of the sun are very dazzling, as even the eagle testifies when he veils his eyes from it, royal as he is. Tomtits and parrots, peacocks and vultures, fluttered about and around Mrs. Withers, perched, chattered, hopped, strutted, longed to pick a bone, found their account one way or other, you may be sure.

But the most accomplished barnacle, adventurer, flatterer, parasite of them all did not succeed in throwing enough dust into her keen eyes to blind her to her own interest for one moment. She used them as the fashionable women of antiquity did the Climacidæ, who were made to go on all fours and serve as a footstool by which they might mount to their coaches. They might forget that "the invitation of the ass to the wedding is to fetch wood and water," and fancied often that they were carrying the particular point which they had at heart, and were using her to excellent advantage; but she knew better. They got what she chose to give; a Roland for an Oliver in every case, — and the Oliver was invariably paid in advance. No Amphytrion of

old understood the management of the parasite better. If she did not throw fish sauce in their eyes at dinner, she certainly knew all about the other processes described by Alciphron, — how to beat them over the head with her American tomahawk, and give them stones smeared with the honey of her smiles and sarcasms.

Not the least of her talents was a genius for getting out of people all that she needed from them. This done, she did not further concern herself about them. Neither did she make the mistake of "dropping" the wrong people. Her instinct in this she could always trust, and "taking up" the right ones was the reverse of the medal, or rather contriving to be taken up by them. Her way of doing this, too, was a thing not commendable in itself, but admirably sagacious and wonderfully effective. She knocked in turn at all the gates of her beloved "Society," which had as many as Thebes, she now found, and in every capital of Europe soon became a familiar figure among "the gay motes in the sunbeams of fashion," a standing *pièce de résistance* in the way of gossip for busy idlers, an object of envy to all the impecunious nobles, dowerless maidens, debt-ridden captains and counts and esquires that infested them, — a synonym for boundless, brilliant prosperity and good fortune. A timid knock it was, sometimes, or a modest ring; but she knew when to blow her trumpets, just as she knew how, once admitted, to coax, fawn, flatter, subsidize, subdue, be all things to some men and women, if by any means she might please and — use them.

The social leaders of the foreign folds one and all succumbed, just as Mrs. Sutton had done, to the march of democracy as personified in this most cool and capable, clever and confident *Américaine — cette chère Américaine.* Dear she might be to them, but she was determined that they should not be dear for her, but singularly cheap. The customs, habits, dress, manners, ideas, or want of ideas, the follies and fribbles of European society, had a certain value for her, but she did not mean to pay through the nose for them. When she first began to recognize the fashionable necessity she was under of becoming a patron of the arts, she utterly routed an astute Italian, Prince Planziani, a nephew of the Pope, by listening with great affability and sweetness to all that he had to say about certain pictures that he wished to sell (and a great mass of criticism upon the treasures of the Vatican, besides), fixing a day for seeing them, and offering him — their exact value, which she had taken the pains to find out from an expert. The poor gentleman was desolated to find that she stood firm, charmed he never so wisely. A woman, an American, a *nouveau riche*, had seemed to him a gift of the gods in the way of a pigeon to pluck, and the most hopeful of combinations.

He got nothing from her, but she learned in three weeks a great deal from him about his world, and added mentally to that list of things to be achieved, or avoided, which she was always inscribing on the tablets of her mind or heart, besides getting some valuable introductions, and really effecting the inter-

view with the Pope, which had been the baseless fabric of the American reporter's vision, but which had piqued her ambition. There was so much to see and do and learn in this delightful Europe that she had not the least wish to return to a husband, valuable, indeed, as the author and source of all her enjoyments, but certainly not indispensable.

Nor did she pine for the society of her children. She reveled in her freedom from all domestic entanglements and anchors. "George does n't care for anything but making money," she thought. "He does n't care about me, or miss me one bit. And I like it over here. I hate to think of all the time I 've wasted in those poky little Western towns. Eureka! Denton! Goodness gracious alive! Philipopolis even! What would Mrs. Sutton think of me *now*, if she could see me! I 'll take a palace in Florence, I think, next winter, and when the girls are ready to come out, I 'll do some entertaining, if I know anything about it! I 'll marry them both off over here. I 've picked out husbands for them now, but I sha'n't say a word about it to George. And I mean to have the real thing, — an Italian prince, or an English duke with supporters to his crest, intimate with Royalty. I must go write to George, he is getting so restless, — perfectly ridiculous! Wants us to come home. It 's all Mary. He wants to see Mary."

She wrote her husband voluminously. She hoped she would n't be exiled much longer from him. It was all for the dear children's sake. She would come home herself, but that the doctor thought a

sea voyage would be very dangerous for her, and she would be obliged to return, she said, and much more of the same sort.

Mr. Withers read this letter, and, being a business man, discounted the statements. "Liz is about the smartest woman I ever knew. But she don't fool me — much. *She* don't want to come home! She don't care if she never comes home. She don't care for anything except splurging, and so long as I cash her checks she is going to stay over there among those barons, and counts, and Lord knows who, she writes about. Well, there 's the children, — if they turn out right. There 's Polly. I wonder if Wallace is learning anything about figures; he did n't know the multiplication table when he went away. He ought to be here — in business — this minute. But his mother would n't have it so. Well, there 's Polly," sighed Mr. Withers.

CHAPTER IX

The Withers girls had certainly no reason to complain of their treatment at the hands of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, French gentlewomen for the most part, admirably fitted for their work, themselves bright examples of what they sought to instill and create. The convent, too, was pleasantly situated, the proportion of *dîners maîgres* not as great as might have been expected, the alternations of study and recreation just those best calculated to produce the best results. The pupils were not too numerous, either, and they were made as comfortable as was consistent with the conventual standard; lacked, indeed, only the luxuries that were not only not necessities, but would have been positive drawbacks, and have made it impossible to give them those habits of order and obedience that form such a valuable part of the discipline of the school.

To this discipline they were all alike subjected, from the Bourbon Princess and girlish representatives of noble and notable names in Spain, France, Italy, Russia, England, Germany, to the beautiful Cuban, Lola Carabajal, and the American and South American heiresses, who were most inclined to find fault with the Wednesday and Friday soups, the fact that nougat and ices were not to be had for the asking or complaining in the refectory on any

day of the week, — the rules and regulations generally of the establishment. A most wholesome simplicity and regularity of life was imposed upon all; an absolute obedience to authority was exacted, that bore hardly on the two Americas; a surveillance that was yet not espionage was maintained; a very real and personal kindness was shown to every pupil alike. The training was that which the ladies had themselves received, and the daily influence of and contact with women so high-bred and gentle, so pure and devout, so unselfish and loving, was in itself the best form of education that has ever been devised.

And as to the accomplishments which Mrs. Withers thought alone vitally necessary to fit young women of position and fortune for this especial world, such liberal provision was made for them that nothing but the sternest determination not to be accomplished would have enabled a pupil to escape them. Everything of the kind was taught there, and so thoroughly that, great as the capacity of the average pupil is for resisting the introduction of knowledge in any form, it was impossible for even the average girl not to gain and store away something from such an amount of constant pressure to the square inch upon her mental surface. The clever and industrious ones often achieved really brilliant results, and upon all did the ladies contrive to set a stamp, a *cachet* of their own, — the hall-mark of the convent school, impossible to describe, but easily recognized; a nameless something, everything; counterpart of that given by the Jesuits to their pupils, and like Chartreuse a monastic

secret, the peculiar property of the Roman communion. To call it dignity, polish, reserve, faultless breeding, is like giving the ingredients that inquisitive chemists have got from specimens of the famous liqueur when carefully analyzed. How they are gauged and fused into such an admirable whole is the question, the unknown secret.

This it was of which Mrs. Withers had heard. This it was that she coveted for her daughters, together with the association with other girls of high rank, that opened up such rosy vistas in her own thoughts and calculations. That either of them should learn the secret of all entirely noble action and motive, purpose and endeavor, of all high and holy womanhood, that should make them "all glorious within" and the daughters of the Great King, was no concern of hers. But she was quite sternly determined that their education should be as nearly that of "the Princess" as possible, in all its worldly aspects, at least. She went into the subject with all her own thoroughness and enterprise. Discovering that West Point and Sandhurst and St. Cyr do not exact a more military subservience, a greater strictness of discipline and severity of *régime*, than is required of every Princess in process of preparation for future honors in Europe, she first studied the system, then gave it her unqualified adherence.

She astonished her daughters not a little at first by the measures she took, the acts of uniformity and conformity that she passed. But she was a whole parliament in her own person, and presently they found themselves living under a new dispensation.

All their jewelry was confiscated. They were put into the simplest gowns ever worn by a French *ingénue.* They were never allowed, even when at home, to stir hand or foot, or go around the corner, without a maid or a chaperone. All public amusements were interdicted. They began the day at six o'clock with a cold plunge, and its every hour was systematically apportioned, — so much rest, so much study, so much relaxation. They were sent to bed early. They were taught to ride and drive, to dance, to fence; the violin, the piano, four modern languages, and Latin. A carefully chosen course of belles-lettres supplemented the regular studies, and there was drawing, painting, and a long series of visits to the galleries, museums, churches, of whatever city they were in.

A serious business altogether. Mary often complained of it, though she abided by it, and benefited by it, too, in body and mind, in speech and voice, in manner and bearing. Naturally intelligent, she "took" to her books in a little while, and with every month of study increasingly enjoyed the enlargement of all her borders. Unaffected and genuine, she had by nature the simplicity that marks the caste of Vere de Vere, and acquired its repose without losing her own charm of spontaneity, her love of innocent fun, her delightful and most infectious gayety.

Altogether, a more charming girl than she became in the course of four years of this kind of training it would not have been easy to find, for she had somehow got the core and heart of all the gentle ladies taught. She was gentle, too, now, and pure

hearted, bright, and brave. Their creed she rejected. She went to chapel because she was required to do so. She conformed outwardly and respectfully to all their observances. But she remained a most flaming little Protestant and American at heart, unlike Matilda, who became to all intents and purposes a French woman, and cared nothing for nationalities or religions, or anything else indeed, except herself. Matilda, or "Mathilde," as she was now altogether called, skillfully evaded much of the convent discipline as she had done that of the Pensionnat Piper. She was an adept at slipping out of disagreeable situations of every kind without seeming to do so. Great was her apparent meekness, unfailing her punctuality, and unquestioning her obedience, yet somehow it was Mary the impulsive who was loved and trusted by the Sisters; Mary who was an immense favorite with the other girls; Mary who was called in ostensibly to be "admonished" by Père Vissat and yet was never scolded; Mary to whom the Princess gave a picture of herself set in brilliants when parting-time came; Mary the lovable whom everybody welcomed as they did flowers and sunshine, — not Matilda. The winter before they left school was an eventful one for both girls, as well as for Paris and the Parisians, — for these last because of a brilliant season and successful Exposition that had attracted all the world, and poured into the arteries of the gay capital representatives of every nationality, Christian and heathen, and into the pockets of her tradespeople their ducats and shekels.

On a certain raw fifth of November day, that was as villainously disagreeable as any across the Channel ever devoted to execrating an event and person figuring in the history taught at the convent as *la conspiration des poudres* and *Sir Fawkes*, — sometimes *ce coquin de Fawkes*, — our American girls got an unexpected holiday. Permission was given them to go to the wedding of a late schoolmate of seventeen, bestowed by thrifty French parents on a copper-colored planter of sixty from the island of Martinique. A pale and dazed little girl, but dimly visible in a cloud of white satin and tulle ("the happy bride," Julie Lamothe), with the affectionate relatives who were so eager to sell their dove in the Temple, had arrived and disappeared into the great door of the Madeleine when the Withers party came into view.

It consisted of Mary, Matilda, Lola Carabajal, and the dragon in charge. Perceiving that they were late, they hurried past the long line of carriages, and Mary was mounting the steps of the church, when she heard a little cry from her sister, who pushed rudely past her and darted on ahead. Surprised, she turned around, and there at her very elbow were some old acquaintances of hers, Miss Piper and her faithful Maria Miller, accompanied by a dashing gentleman, a stranger. It was so pleasant to see anybody from America in that foreign land that Mary the patriotic quite forgot that she had detested Miss Piper and all her life at the New York school most thoroughly. There were little cries and exclamations on both sides. Miss

Piper was always positively tender to her prosperous ex-pupils, and seeing that Mary was emphatically of this class, embraced her with effusion. "My dear Marie, how tall, how lovely, how elegant you have grown!" she cried; "and surely that was Mathilde who passed us? Let me present the Marquis de Mongolfier."

Here the strange gentleman, who had been staring up the steps fixedly, swept off his hat and made a bow that expressed any amount of profound respect for Miss Withers, which was more than could be said for the bold glance of his big black eyes. There was a vivid, alert something in the whole air of the Marquis, such as Grimalkin shows when Miss Mouse's sleek head and bright eyes are seen appearing from that black hole on the left side of the mantelpiece that there is no stopping up, — a suppressed gleam of triumph, telling of crunched bones to come. "You know Maria Miller," Miss Piper went on. And Mary did know her, for though this amiable slave and shadow of the imposing Piper was decked out in quite unparalleled splendor as to her garments, it is not in the power of milliner or modiste, fur or satin, to destroy the all-pervading limpness and meekness of the indigent she-barnacle, and as she stood there, poor Maria Miller was most unmistakably her own old self.

A faint smile, deprecatory, as it seemed, of a cloak that the richest woman might have worn; a faint blush that besought forgiveness for a bonnet with two plumes, the only ones she had ever worn, bought at first hand for her, and real (not dyed

purple after being worn blue for several seasons by Miss Piper, or manufactured of odd bits); an apologetic hand that was abashed to find itself in whole gloves that had never been to the cleaners, a hand timidly put forth, timidly withdrawn, — these with a warm light in a pair of kind, faded old eyes proclaimed Maria Miller more plainly than her own passport to familiar eyes. "How do you do, Mary, my dear — I mean Miss Withers — excuse the liberty of an old friend — I mean acquaintance," she said.

"Why, you dear old Mint Drops!" cried Mary, calling her by her sobriquet in the school and embracing her affectionately, while the dragon looked stonily on and exclaimed in French, "Mademoiselle! In the public streets of Paris!"

"It is a *friend*, of course, — and I am perfectly delighted to see you. Only what has brought you to Paris, of all places!" exclaimed Mary.

Miss Miller looked with carefully veiled and bridled significance at her patroness, as if imploring her to say something out of which nobody could make anything.

"Why, what is it?" laughed Mary gayly. "There is some mystery here, evidently."

"I am in Paris on very particular private business," said Miss Piper very majestically even for her, and as if she, too, had awful reservations, and could if she chose make awful revelations. "And Maria is with me." She glanced at her friend the Marquis as she spoke, and he, for his part, lifted his heavy brows a little and twirled his cane easily and indifferently, as he looked with a smile of Mephisto-

phelian amiability and ambiguity at the tips of his carefully lacquered boots.

"Mademoiselle, is it that she spends all the morning here?" now remonstrated the dragon.

Lola Carabajal, whom the Marquis was now honoring with his detestable regards, slipped her hand about Mary's arm and said, "Come!" farewells ensued, addresses were exchanged. The Marquis conveyed perfect and profound personal devotion to each of the girls in turn by his bows, and the two parties separated.

The imposing ceremony they had come to see was soon over, and the most awful vows that human lips can utter had been taken before a highly fashionable audience, rather than before the God of love and truth, on purely fashionable grounds and principles, or rather lack of principle. A most mediæval-looking priest, with a beautiful face, venerable and benignant in the extreme, had given the benediction that would have come far more appropriately from a monk of the order of Saint Beelzebub. Poor little Julie was gone her sorrowful way, and the acolytes were extinguishing the tapers on the high altar that had accentuated the gloom of the great church during the whole iniquitous proceeding, when Mary turned to tell her sister of her recent rencontre.

"Why did you run away, Matty? You were always a favorite with Miss Piper. And you would have laughed to see dear old Miller got up for Paris! And there was a horrid man with them, — the Marquis de Mongolfier, she called him. I detested him. She took mamma's address, and is coming to see us. What made you bolt off like that?"

"I wanted to get good seats and see them come in," said Matilda. "And it has been a beautiful wedding, — so *chic!* Everybody who is anybody in all Paris is here. Did you notice the lace on her dress? It was superb! And her pearls! She has made a splendid match. What on earth is Miss Piper doing here? And why did you give our address? We shall be bored to death with her now. You say that was a Marquis with her?"

Lola answered the question by saying that he was *bel homme*, and had eyes, — but eyes! And a Marquis, yes.

"I don't think him handsome a bit," said Mary. "And I don't call this a beautiful wedding, either. That old pumpkin of a planter! Old enough to be her grandfather, too. Poor Julie! I 'd like to see anybody make a French marriage for me!"

Not a detail of the affair, the dresses, the conduct of the bridal party, the great people present, the fact that state liveries were being sported by them, — nothing had escaped Matilda. The gifts, the trousseau, the enviable future of her schoolmate, would ordinarily have made her eloquent for days. But she scarcely opened her lips as they drove home.

"Why so *triste?*" asked the dragon, with the kind of small spitefulness of observation that did duty for sympathy with her. "Mademoiselle has of what to think?" Whereupon Matilda blushed furiously for almost the first time within Mary's memory. She was thinking of the Mongolfier she had known in New York, but said nothing, and yet contrived to express so much contempt and disdain

of the dragon that that lady indulged in only half-subdued sniffs and snorts during a drive of three miles that followed, and longed unspeakably to be as insulting as she considered herself insulted.

The dragon was a Mlle. Tringat, a middle-aged Swiss whom Mrs. Withers picked up in Geneva when she first went on the Continent, and had found and made extremely useful to her ever since. She was half maid, half companion, whole hypocrite. She had, or rather seemed to have, no opinions, no wishes or ideas of her own, which exactly suited Mrs. Withers's imperious temper. She was slavishly subservient to her mistress, for whom she had not one grain of sincere attachment, had a low, buzzing voice, and was meek in manner to a degree that made her more offensive than if she had been a Xantippe.

"There is never anything that one can take hold of in Tringat," said Mary one day, when she felt that Tringat had been particularly elusive and infuriating even for her, though she was always as unseizable in her totality as a billiard ball. "There is nothing to strike, or to stand on, for that matter, but she is the one creature in the world who makes me feel positively vicious. I long to shake her. I can scarcely keep my hands off her sometimes."

"Oh, nonsense, Marie! you are so absurd and exaggerated always," said Matilda. "Make use of the woman; that is all you 've got to do. What does it matter what she is? She might be a murderess for all I 'd care, as long as she served my chocolate hot and devised becoming toilettes for me. That

last sage-green confection of hers, though, was detestable."

"Don't call me 'Marie,' if you please, Matty," fumed Mary, quite unconvinced and rebellious. "My name is plain American Mary."

"And don't call me 'Matty,' replied her sister. "*My name* is — at least I choose to be called Mathilde."

Tringat had grasped the situation in the Withers household before she had been there a week. She knew whom she had to please, to propitiate always; whom she could afford to displease; who was hammer and who was anvil. She perfectly understood that Mrs. Withers was master and mistress in one, and got the length of her foot, and contrived to make herself acceptable, indeed indispensable, in that quarter. It was Tringat who used to take Mary to M. Deschamps's studio for lessons in painting when Mrs. Withers was in Paris. After the girls left the convent, Mary had developed a very pretty talent for painting in water-colors, and her mother, who was ambitious that she should excel in it for the sake of displaying it before her great friends rather than for any pleasure or profit it might bring her, was careful to give her every opportunity of cultivating it.

Now it happened, only a few days before Christmas, that Mary started out with Tringat to take this lesson, very much against her will. If she had only known it, she might have spared herself the trouble, and might easily have changed the whole future of her life, a future with which her thoughts

were already very busy, glancing about it like so many butterflies, lighting here, there, everywhere, but spreading their wings again immediately, and floating off into the happy unknown ; not dreaming of men as of creatures capable of making and using butterfly-nets, but as of curiously interesting objects having pleasant, undefined possibilities of becoming more interesting still, and an agreeable habit of being invariably interested in and kind to her.

For Mary was a woman now. Just when she had become one, she could not have told, nor could anybody else. Girls grow for all the world like hyacinths. First two leaves, green, unpromising, commonplace, slow of development ; then a tender, straight stem hiding between them, shooting up daily taller and taller. Then what is this pale, plume-like, colorless formation struggling to shape and unfold itself ? And lo, one more kiss from the sun or tear from the rain, and it bursts into a hyacinth, rose-pink or pure white, fair and sweet, spring incarnate ! Mrs. Withers, who would have had to be born over again on another planet and principle to really understand or like anything so simple, pure, beautiful, as the heart of a hyacinth, looked upon Mary as still quite a child, an unsatisfactory child, found much fault with her incorrigible honesty and spontaneity, lamented often that she had not learned and never would learn to be "like Matilda." To have been like Matilda would have been to be intensely artificial and conventional in all her surface manifestations, and very thin and poor as to soil.

If Matilda resembled any flower, it was the ca-

mellia, so coldly, severely correct was she, a hot-house plant carefully trained, stiffly elegant, destitute of charm, perfume, and all that makes the soul of a flower. Tringat quite respected Matilda, and was generally in sympathy with her. She looked upon Mary as a spoiled and unpleasant child. The ladies of her convent thought of her as a sweet, affectionate child. Her schoolmates considered her a wonderfully stupid and backward one in some respects. She, the prettiest girl in the house, never to have had an "affair," not even one *in futuro;* never to talk of admirers, and to spend all that time on a doll's outfit for the cook's lame sister! Lola Carabajal, who was the next prettiest, and whose one idea was man, past, present, and to come, who fancied herself secretly adored by every man she met, even Père Vissat, — Lola, who was always taking the girls off into corners to talk to them about her triumphs and hopes, said of Mary: "Yes, she is pretty, but she will have no admirers." And Matilda, who envied her beauty and school popularity, remarked to her mother: "Mary has good looks, but that is all. She has no manner; she will have no success; she will never make a *furore;* she is nothing but a great baby," — in which estimate of her youngest daughter Mrs. Withers quite agreed.

But to return to the lesson. Tringat had certainly been put in a temper by being told to take "Mlle. Marie" to Deschamps on that particular morning. Nobody could have taken to the European system of domestic management more kindly than Mrs. Withers, and she did not graft upon it "Amer-

ican notions," as she now called all distinctively American ideas, or dilute the fine old crusted port of feudal survivals with what she considered democratic ditch-water. Tringat was not allowed to forget that a great gulf yawned between her and her mistress. The most absolute obedience was demanded of her. Plans, wishes, were for her betters and not for "inferiors." She was frequently reminded of her "position," or rather want of it; and she never rebelled or expostulated, made no demands, but ever crawled and fawned and flattered.

So on this day, although she had been told that she might have the morning in which to attend to some pressing private affairs, she only smiled unctuously when Mrs. Withers revoked that permission, and bade her get ready to "attend mademoiselle," and said, "But yes, certainly, since it is the wish of madame, who is always so indulgent towards her poor Tringat. Is it not so, *mon amour?* She is an angel for us, for all the world." This last remark was made to Mrs. Withers's King Charles spaniel, which she picked up and folded passionately to her bosom.

"She has n't had her breakfast yet, mamma," said Mary. "Oh, dear! I do wish I was back in America, and did n't have to have all my footsteps dogged by somebody. M. Deschamps must be seventy, if he is a day, and I don't see why I can't go alone and take my lesson and be done with it. It is so absurd."

"Young girls of high rank never go anywhere alone in Europe, Marie," said Mrs. Withers. "You

can get something when you come back, — can't you, Tringat?"

"I have had the cup of coffee; it is altogether enough. I have not hunger; oh, no! Madame must permit that I tell to her how ravishing she is in that breakfast cap! Tell her that she is beautiful!" (to the dog). "*Oui*" (as he barked), "thou seest it also, my angel! But he is clever, this dog; nothing escapes him. Madame would not wish that I should see Valcour about that parasol-cover?" All Tringat's questions were put in a negatively interrogative form.

"As you please. Be off now, Tringat, at once," said Mrs. Withers; and, thus dismissed, Tringat was off as soon as Mary had tied on (very pettishly, it must be confessed) a large green hat with black plumes, in which she was charming, standing before the pier-glass at the end of the breakfast-room. But once in the street, the dragon's smile vanished, and her teeth and claws were unsheathed as far as she dared. Her every remark showed a subcutaneous irritation, and the acid in her civilities quite neutralized the sweet phrases in which they were couched. But it was one of her luxuries to be disagreeable to Mary, and she was privately resenting being obliged to carry that young lady's sketching materials. M. Deschamps's studio was on the fourth floor of an apartment house a mile away, and by the time they got there, Tringat's temper had not been improved by fatigue added to hunger.

"If mademoiselle will have the goodness to excuse me, I will take my precautions. To faint, to

make a scene, it is not my wish. I am poor, I am governess, it is true, but to me also it is something that I destroy not my health; at least, that I live. I will rejoin mademoiselle *à l'instant*," she said, and was about to dive into a pastry-cook's on the ground floor, when Mary took her sketch-book and paint-box from her with an impatient, "Why did n't you get something at home, as I told you? Not that I mind."

"Oppose myself to the wishes of madame? I? Who am I that I should *agacer* madame and keep mademoiselle waiting for a mere trifle? Say that I fall, I die, — one governess the less in the world. Governess do I say? — *maid!* A widowed parent in despair, — *c'est tout! Pas grande chose*, you will say, and you have reason."

"I should n't say anything of the sort, Tringat," replied Mary tartly, always offended by her mock-humility. "Don't trouble yourself to invent sentiments for me, please. Take your own time. I'll promise not to elope with M. Deschamps meanwhile." She ran up the steep Parisian stairs, as she spoke, without a single halt, arrived at the well-known door, tapped. The door was opened immediately, but not by feeble, white-haired M. Deschamps, who was wont to execute six at least of his best bows on that landing by way of welcome, palette or mall-stick in hand, his mien all deference and grave civility.

This was a young gentleman, tall, with clear, grave eyes, a charming smile, a manner absolutely deferential, but with a certain independence of bearing and an easy grace, who made one bow and said,

"Is this Miss Withers? I hope you got M. Deschamps's note? I am Mr. De Trobriand, and he has asked me to take his classes. Pray come in; will you not?" Blushing and breathless, Mary had not been consciously eloquent certainly, but youth and beauty and sweetness spoke for her in about nineteen languages before she opened her lips. And though she only said, "Yes, thank you," nobody ever made a more telling speech. Warren Hastings, Pitt, Fox, Curran, Webster combined could not have produced such an effect upon Mr. De Trobriand in the same words and time. "She is charming," he thought, as he watched her take off her hat and gloves and get her palette and paints.

In five minutes they were speaking English. In ten more they had found out that they were both Americans. In twenty they had become almost friends, and Tringat smiled her sourest-sweet smile when she rejoined her charge, and found her with flushed cheeks, laughing like a happy child over something Mr. De Trobriand had told her about his life as a student in Paris.

Most fortunately for two young people, who ever after felt grateful to him for it, M. Deschamps was for the next six weeks confined to his bed with pneumonia, and then had to go away to Switzerland for two weeks more of convalescence. Golden weeks these, made up of the days described so perfectly as "*les jours heureux quand j'étais si misérable;*" the divine fever, the temporary madness, the lifelong union of two hearts, honest and good above most others.

Tringat knew what was happening quite well, though they did not. But she was angry with Mrs. Withers for having refused her a holiday, and let it go on. Never a word did she say to madame, but sat in her corner week after week, and looked on at the blushes and glances, heard the sighs, the whispers, and calculated upon the effect of these causes. "*Ma foi! Qu'ils sont absurdes*," she would say to herself, with a shrug of her lean shoulders. And no doubt they were sometimes, for love, the infatuation of two, is often the amusement of many.

CHAPTER X

A LADY, very simply dressed, almost shabbily, yet quite unmistakably the lady, was sitting on a bench in the Bois, with her tall, handsome son, when the Withers carriage came rolling by one frosty day in all its splendor, varnish, silver-plate, wigs, liveries, match-footmen, and all. As it chanced, Mrs. Withers stopped to have a word with the Marquis de Mongolfier, who had been presented to her a few days previous by his sister, the Duchesse d'Hauteville Sauveterre.

That gentleman was driving, in smart English fashion, a dogcart, with a mite of a groom behind, all buttons; and on seeing Mrs. Withers, he leaped down and stood with his foot on her carriage step talking to her and to her daughters, so that the two people on the bench had an opportunity of thoroughly inspecting the party before them. It is difficult to say whether Mrs. De Trobriand (for it was she) or her son gazed more intently at the three ladies, whose resplendent toilettes would have repaid the most careful feminine investigation. "Where have I seen that face before?" thought Mrs. De Trobriand, as she looked at the mother."

"Confounded puppy!" fumed her son, jealously regarding Mongolfier, offended by his polished manners, his faultless attire, his air of easy intimacy

with a family whose acquaintance the artist coveted as he had never done that of any other, for certain good and natural reasons.

Presently Polly, who was pouting on the front seat, listening with a frown to the amiable speeches of the Marquis, lifted her eyes and looked toward the bench. If Mrs. Withers had not been so busy cultivating the French nobility, she might have seen Polly's vivid blush and Mr. De Trobriand's bow; but she was oblivious of everything except that the dear Marquis was actually asking to be allowed to spend some of his evenings at her hotel, and asked if he should not amuse the ladies in some way, — he could sing, ah, yes! he could play, ah, yes! he was at their service.

The carriage rolled away presently, when this little matter had been satisfactorily settled, and Mrs. De Trobriand turned to her son. "I know that woman! I knew I had seen her before! I met her, at least I saw her, out in the West, when your father went out there for his railroad!" she exclaimed. "But what a change! She was a very vulgar creature then, and now she *looks* like a woman of the highest fashion. What on earth brought her here?"

"By Jove! you don't mean it. You know her, you say, mother? Delightful! Take me there to call, won't you? Do, mother, do. That was Polly — my pupil, Miss Withers — on the front seat. Isn't she lovely? Could n't we go to-day?" replied the son eagerly.

Mrs. De Trobriand's mother ear heard a great deal more than appeared on the surface in John De

Trobriand's, "That was Polly." That simple sentence, indeed, was the cipher that unlocked, unraveled, and explained many hidden, tangled, mysterious things that she had noticed in her boy for three months past. Her mother heart quickened with an apprehensive, "I hope to Heaven he is n't in love with that girl." Her mother pride added, "Why not? He is entitled to marry *anybody*. And in point of family she is a nobody." She rose from her seat. "Let us go on, dear," she said, "and take a nice little walk."

It is needless to say that in the course of that walk she deftly turned her son's heart out as if it had been his pockets, and learned exactly how matters stood. "But all that money, dear! I remember now that Fred Mastin, whom I used to know in Eureka as a boy, and who is here now as the guest of honor at a scientific congress, told me that he was staying with some immensely rich Americans named Withers. It never once occurred to me that it could be *those* people! How queerly things turn out in this world. Why, my boy, you saw for yourself the kind of son-in-law that woman is looking out for. She would n't look at *you*," she said to her son, slipping her arm in his to take away the sting of the remark and pressing it warmly.

"I know, mother. But Polly is nineteen; and I don't know, but I think she cares for me a little — and I love her. You *must* take me there. I am ashamed to go on seeing her at old Deschamps's studio any longer. It seems dishonorable; if I am to make love, I 'll do it before them all. They sha'n't

have it to say that I was underhanded about it, though, to be sure, that old skeleton Tringat has been curled up in her corner like an old spider all the time. I wonder who that marquis chap was. Confound his impudence! he did n't even throw away his cigar. I 'd like to kick him uncommonly. When will you go, mother?"

"I don't like going at all, my dear, to tell you the truth. I had the barest acquaintance with Mrs. Withers. I scarcely think it would be agreeable for either of us to renew it."

"Oh, but, *mother!* You *will!* For my sake," urged the lover, catching at her hand. There was no resisting this appeal, of course.

"Very well, then. But I shall say nothing of ever having met her before. It would be very tactless, and not improve your chances — if you *have* any chances. Oh, dear! She is a sweet, pretty young creature, to be sure. But" —

"Now, mother, I can't hear any 'buts' or 'ifs.' Polly is good enough for a king, let alone a second-rate artist, and I mean to get her, if I can. I don't want her money. I want her, Heaven bless her!" There was a good hour of this, and it ended in Mrs. De Trobriand's going home, and resurrecting from the bottom of her trunk the sole remaining silk that she possessed, and altering it while she sent her son out for a pair of fresh gloves. A haughty major-domo and a dozen flunkies in powder ushered them through a beautiful little garden, down interminable corridors, into a white and gold salon decorated by Lefebvres. Mrs. Withers was enthroned at one

end. The usual group of ladies were taking tea. Mr. Mastin (our old friend, so incorrigibly given over to bird's-nesting and neglectful of gain), now one of the great Americans, leaned against the mantelshelf.

Mrs. Withers no sooner saw Mrs. De Trobriand than she recognized her. All the old life at Eureka, all its bareness, vulgarity, poverty, rose up before her. But her annoyance at finding any link with her past established in Paris was soothed by Mrs. De Trobriand's assumption of meeting her for the first time. A flush of gratification rose to her cheek as she looked around the room. She received them with cordiality, and did not notice how Polly stepped on the very toes of an august and much annoyed butler in her haste to place a chair for Mrs. De Trobriand. Mr. Mastin she considered herself to have won over and silenced by making him her guest, though that absent-minded savant had little time and less thought for such matters. It would not do to be rude, she reflected. Was not Mrs. De Trobriand's cousin the wife of the American Minister? But what poverty! What a bonnet! Her brilliant smile and mock-geniality fell coldly upon young De Trobriand, who disliked her on the spot, but he managed to get five minutes alone with Polly, in the course of the visit, which was something.

Their call over, at the door they almost tumbled over Mongolfier, entering sidewise, as if to make room for a pair of tremendous mustaches, stiffly waxed. They heard his "*Me voici, madame, — déjà,*" and John De Trobriand, looking back, saw

him ogling Polly in a way that made John want to kill him on the spot. Matilda, on the contrary, tried to get her mother to send Polly out of the room; failing in this, invented an errand for her, which Polly, nothing loath, briskly undertook, that she might be alone and think of *Him*.

She came upon Miss Piper as she left the Bon Marché, and, chancing to mention that she had left Mathilde to amuse M. Mongolfier, was astonished by the angry flash that issued from the big black eyes of her late preceptress, and puzzled by the look she exchanged with her shadow, Maria Miller. "Oh, *that's* where he is!" exclaimed Miss Piper, and fell into a brown study over this innocent piece of information.

"My angel! Don't be hasty," whispered Miss Miller, behind her large red hand.

"What is it? What's the matter?" asked Polly the direct of both ladies. But she got no answer from either, except a handshake and a good-by, rather stiff from Miss Piper, and of the limpest from her humble friend. Polly saw Miss Piper pull up the window of her cab with an angry jerk, saw Miss Miller's head executing a series of mild bobs, felt vaguely certain that "something was up," but what it was she could not for the life of her imagine.

She little knew that Miss Piper was purchasing her trousseau as the future Marquise de Mongolfier at that very fascinating shop that very day; that she had just settled sixty thousand dollars (her entire fortune) on her *fiancé* before a notary; that she had not seen him for a week. Mongolfier had

met Miss Piper in New York, as we know, when he was elegantly engaged as billiard marker at a certain establishment in that big landing-net for so many queer kinds of foreigners. He had run across her again in Paris when his fortunes were at the lowest possible ebb, and he had been ready enough to transfer the Piper sixty thousand to his private account at his banker's until he heard of the Withers fortune of sixty millions. That had sent him off to consult his sister the duchess, who had lent him all her aid and counsel, and highly commended his sagacity.

"But you are clever, Alcide! *Certes!* It is the most high time for you to range yourself. And the fortune is one that all the world talks of. There is no doubt, my brother?"

"*Pas du tout! pas du tout, c'est énorme!* I have made my little inquiries, I assure you, my cat. I have taken my precautions," replied the innocent and prudent *prétendant.*

"Alcide! there is something. Remember you that the American girl is million times more prude and *dévote* than the English. Be careful. Seek to pose a little as *homme de famille.* Hearest thou?"

"*Précisément.* Look thou here, my sister," said Mongolfier, opening and displaying a neat package of books that he had brought with him. "I go to read to those ladies aloud in the evenings. Behold the choice. I take not what brings the blush. Ah, *non!* There I go as *mari, père de famille probablement. Tiens!* I asked of the wife of the Protestant *curé* her recommendations of all that was

most virtuous and admirable. *Elle m'a dit les œuvres de Mlle. Edgeworth et de Hannah More.* Oh, I go to make the impression favorable with these, that is certain."

John De Trobriand, going as he did to the Hôtel Montbuissy on any and every occasion and every pretext possible, was turned green and positively purple by encountering Mongolfier so constantly, — on the steps in the morning with a huge bouquet of wild flowers, symbolical of his simple and pure attachment to the Withers money-bags; in his Tilbury and Park suits in the afternoon; ensconced in the very bosom of the family in the evening, reading Hannah More in his comical French-English, with an apparently deep and heartfelt appreciation of the *sentiments admirables de cette honnête femme.* "Madame," he would say, "*tout franchement.*" He always prefaced all his stupendous crams with this formula, as everybody who knew him was well aware. "Madame," he would say impressively, closing the book at certain points in the *honnête femme's* admirable disquisitions, "I have never been more emotioned than by these sentiments, — so pure, so chaste!" Occasionally he would drop the furtive tear, and cloud up as for rain, but generally mastered himself in time to avoid crumpling his becoroneted handkerchief seriously.

It was delicious to see him playing the crocodile so cleverly on these occasions, or would have been to any one who knew the real man. John De Trobriand would sniff cynically over his comments on the "*excellente* Edgeworth." Mrs. Withers would

almost invariably fall asleep over his mellifluous periods, and after he was gone pettishly wonder "what on earth the man meant by reading all that stuff from those two old pokes." Mathilde, even, would stifle a great many yawns behind her bit of laced cambric, as the evening wore on. But Mongolfier, serene in the conviction that he was playing *à merveille* the rôle of the American husband and father, read on and on until the little ormolu clock on the mantelshelf often struck twelve o'clock before he rose and made his bow.

But, strange to say, his admiration for that kind of literature miraculously disappeared the moment he found himself outside the door of Mrs. Withers's hotel. The moment he found himself in his cab, he flung the "Œuvres de Hannah More" in a corner and fell back upon Paul de Kock, in which he would be absorbed all the way to the club. "Alphonse, *mon ami*," he would say to his friend M. Mercier, "behold the victim of American stupidity, barbarity! *Pouf!* Some absinthe, and where are the cards? I am martyr as *fiancé*. All the day following about the women like a lackey! All the afternoon the *fiancée* she sing! *Pas de voix, absolument. C'est terrible!* But I have to listen before I marry me; I am oblige, — yes. *Et puis*, — I take my hat and walk the streets! *C'est inouï!*" Or he would go off to his sister, and, finding her in her bedroom in the hands of her *coiffeuse*, fling himself in an easy chair and unburden himself.

"What hast thou? Thou seemest not of a good humor to-day, *mon frère*," that amiable lady would

say, as she rose and kissed him. "I hope you are not in trouble *again?*" Mongolfier always brought his "troubles" to her, and as they invariably meant finding him the largest possible amount of money in the shortest possible time, she spoke with concern.

"No," he replied in Spanish. "It is only that I die of this marriage, — these Americans. I often think I had better break with them. Other girls there are, — European, and more civilized. And I am bored, — but bored!"

"Alcide, never! The father has sixty-five millions, they say, and there are but three children. Never! It would be madness!" exclaimed the Duchess, quite horrified.

"But, Amélie, listen. The Americans, *ces bons bourgeois*, spend *always* the evening at home! *Figurez-vous! suffocation! imbéciles!* One more week, — *et puis!*" he concluded, with a most expressive shrug.

"Alcide, no follies! no imprudence, remember! *Après!* do as you please. And look thou, confide in Madame Mère what must be found out, — you understand?"

He did understand; nobody better. A tremendous intimacy sprang up between the Duchess and Mrs. Withers about this time. Mongolfier owed two hundred thousand dollars of gambling debts alone. The Duchess was all attention and affection. On the other hand, a coronet Mrs. Withers was determined to have in the family. Mongolfier drove poor penniless John De Trobriand almost wild by his

attentions to Polly. But he need not have troubled himself in the least. Polly was fathoms deep in love with her John, and let Mongolfier see that she was emphatically not to be had for the asking. And so it came about that when that astute adventurer made his formal proposition for the hand of his "dear madame's daughter," and she asked which daughter had had the good fortune to win such an inestimable treasure in the way of a husband, he replied: —

"Madame, do not ask me. Between two young girls so admirably brought up as these daughters of yours, it would be an impertinence to choose." He delivered himself of this lofty moral conclusion with great unction. But Mrs. Withers was not an American for nothing. If it suited her hand to play this game with just such a partner, it was not without contempt that she suddenly unmasked all his batteries.

"And how much would you expect as dot?" she asked him suddenly, with a hard glint of comprehension in her eyes that quite alarmed him.

"*Mais*, madame, speak not of money!" said Mongolfier.

"Oh, stuff! *Combien!*" reiterated Mrs. Withers firmly; "*combien!*"

"Madame, you insist? *Eh bien.* At least a half million — settled on me before the marriage — as a beginning," he whispered greedily, his eyes shining like a tiger's over the agreeable prospect.

"All right, you can have Mathilde," remarked Mrs. Withers sententiously, "and I will see to everything."

Forthwith the engagement of this pair of turtle-doves was duly announced, and caused in Paris a respectful sneer at the good luck of Mongolfier, with some surprise that Miss Withers had not looked higher; in America, that extraordinary thrill of satisfaction that always accompanies the sacrifice of a well-known American girl and fortune. It created a pretty stir in some other quarters. Polly and John were having a good cosy talk over the situation one morning, unwatched by anybody, — even Tringat. "I don't see how she can marry him; I hate him," that impetuous young person was confiding to a most sympathetic listener, when with a rush and swirl of skirts Miss Piper swept past the servants at the door and demanded to see Mathilde, just as that young woman was entering the long salon at the other end. John caught up his hat and fled before her, scenting a scene. Polly stood transfixed by the volley of words that lady poured out upon her ex-pupil.

"Scheming, intriguing, shameful piece that you are, trying to take my husband from me. Mongolfier is engaged to *me*, and has been for three months. It is me that he prefers," she shouted. "How dare you stand there and look me in the face, say!" she shrieked. "You and your precious mother have bought him off from me. Don't you suppose I know that? Get out of my sight, you — wretch!"

"A likely tale," commented Mathilde calmly. "You must be drunk, — yes, *drunk!* Do you suppose I believe that Mongolfier would marry you?"

"Come and see the contract in which I gave him my fortune, — come and see my trousseau, — ask *him*, if you don't believe me," panted Miss Piper, her face like a peony. "But don't think I am going to stand it. I shall show you up; I mean to tell everybody." The two ladies were still at it hammer and tongs, to the no small amusement of the servants, when as it chanced the Marquis was announced.

"Alcide!" shrieked Miss Piper, "say that you are mine. Tell that wretch the truth." She flew to him and embraced him, and Mongolfier's face was a study.

"*Chère Pipère!* There! there! *Calme toi.* See your bonnet, it is crooked." Miss Piper instinctively released him, and he profited by the movement to walk away, to bow to Mathilde. "Behold my *fiancée*," he said. "Be reasonable; it was talked of between us, *mais oui.* It is now quite differently arranged." On hearing this Miss Piper started up from the chair on which she had sunk. She had been angry enough before; she was now raving. She foamed outright, sputtered, gasped, abused both Mongolfier and Mathilde like a fishwife, and flung from the room, vowing vengeance on both the guilty parties.

"*Voyez-vous*, Mathilde, a man of my appearance, my accomplishments, is born to give pain," remarked Mongolfier, striking a fatuous attitude on the hearth-rug and tugging at his long mustache. "Seek to make excuses for her. A jealous woman! And that poor *Pipère!* She is not the only one who

mourns Mongolfier." He put on his *vainqueur* look and slapped his chest, as who should say, "Look at me! How can the poor things help it!" Nevertheless, Mathilde was very angry with him, and retired, pleading a headache. "She also!" remarked Mongolfier to Polly, as he passed her on his way out. "Oh, these women! these women!"

"I'd see you in Kamchatka before I'd marry you, after that!" announced Polly hotly.

"*Mais pourquoi donc?*" asked Mongolfier, caressing his hat. His tone was one of genuine surprise.

"You call yourself a French gentleman, but let me tell you that there is n't an American *cowboy* who would do what you have done," added Polly.

"*Mademoiselle est fâchée*," replied Mongolfier placidly.

"No, I am not *fâchée*. I am just *disgusted*. Get out of my sight, can't you?" retorted Polly hotly, stamping her foot. And out of her sight he went, having had enough of tears and tempers for one afternoon, no doubt.

Two German officers, an Irish baronet, three French gentlemen, and an Italian Israelite, who had been paying Mathilde very marked attentions, promptly transferred their time, speeches, bouquets, and affections (?) to Polly, to her intense disgust and John De Trobriand's infinite annoyance.

"As if I could n't see through it! As if I did n't know that all they want is popper's money!" exclaimed that indignant young lady to him, on one of the few rare occasions when she chanced to be alone

with him. "Why, any of them would marry Tringat, if she was sixty and pockmarked, if she were in my place."

"Ah, but some other nice fellow will come along with a title!" sighed John.

After this the preparations for the marriage set in on a scale of magnificence that made even Paris stare. An Austrian princess was having her trousseau made at the same time and places, but it did not compare with Mathilde's, — she was only a Hapsburgher.

Mrs. Withers and Mathilde spent weeks in giving orders, making inspections. Stuffs were chosen, laces expressly woven, jewels bought, and jewels reset. All Cannes was asked to the wedding, all Paris. Heaven only knows where Mongolfier got the money, but he presented his bride elect with a magnificent *corbeille*.

Mr. Withers was written to, and wired back, "Take the next boat." He arrived soon after, met Mongolfier, and conceived at once an intense repulsion for him. "I'd as lieve see her marry a greaser," he said. "He'll not get one red cent of *my* money."

The day of the espousals came, and with it all fashionable Paris. The Hôtel Montmorenci, which Mrs. Withers had just taken on a long lease, always elegant and imposing, was transformed into a huge conservatory. Her huge Suisse glittered like a French marshal on a field day; her corps of flunkies put Mr. Withers into such a rage by their numbers and magnificence and impertinence that he could

scarcely contain himself. The Archbishop of Paris, two bishops, and six priests put in their appearance at the hour named, followed by four lawyers and as many lawyers' clerks. The street was blocked with carriages for half a mile, and guarded by *gendarmes*. Mathilde's dress was one of Worth's costliest inspirations. Mrs. Withers was enchanted, and all went well until Mongolfier found that only two hundred thousand dollars and an income of fifty thousand a year was to be given his wife. No provision whatever had been made for him.

"*Moi!* Sieur de La Foret, Baron de Luyne, Comte de Neuville, Marquis de Mongolfier, Pair de France, thus treated!" he roared, regardless of the notaries, the assembled company, Mathilde, everybody.

"Well, that is five thousand apiece!" grunted Mr. Withers.

"Monsieur, take your daughter! I renounce her. I am not a *chef*. I am not a Spaniard. I am a French noble of the *ancien régime*," he said to Mr. Withers, pointing to Mathilde, white with anger. There was a terrific uproar all around. The Duchesse d'Hauteville, together with all Mongolfier's relatives, counseled peace and the signing of the contract, feeling that half a loaf was much better than none at all, and retired with him to the boudoir adjoining. Mathilde and Mrs. Withers made a private assault upon Mr. Withers, who finally agreed to give his daughter another hundred thousand more. This being made known, Mongolfier relented, received Mathilde back into favor, and signed the contract.

The deed was done. A gorgeous wedding followed. The pair were married in an ex-royal chapel by a specially appointed papal legate. The American newspapers had columns about the affairs. Mathilde was received into the Roman Church and given away by her sponsor, the Queen of Bavaria. And Polly, coming home in the same carriage with Mr. Withers when it was all over, thought, "Popper is growing an old man," as she saw him lean a tired head against the cushions.

"Well," he said, "I hope they are satisfied. It was the biggest sort of show. How on earth did your mother get to know all those high-flyers? That Mongolfier is a poor sort of son-in-law to invest in, though, — not worth a cent on the dollar in anything I know. I suppose I'll have to support him, too. When are you all coming home, any way? Ain't you had about enough of Europe? I hope *you* are not going to marry any of these French no-Counts, Polly. I hope you've got more sense."

"I have! I won't marry anybody but an American," announced Polly earnestly, taking his hand.

"That's right. Your head is level," replied Mr. Withers, regarding this speech as an evidence of fervid patriotism. If he had been told that a poor artist was thinking of asking him for the apple of his eye, he would have been a good deal more tired and a vast deal more disgusted. "American" for him meant "a solid man" in lumber or grain or pork. He had no respect for artists whatever, domestic or foreign.

CHAPTER XI

The bride and groom had no sooner left Paris for Norway, summer being now at hand, than Miss Piper promptly instituted a suit for breach of contract against her faithless Marquis. She gained it, moreover, and put three thousand francs in her purse in lieu of the ten she claimed, and took herself and her friend back to America. The heart that loved her best was full of sympathy and compassion for her, and tended her carefully through the illness that followed; but because it beat in poor Maria Miller's bosom, Miss Piper got small comfort from its tenderness, and gave herself again to her old duties, a soured and embittered woman. If the world knows nothing of its greatest men, it is certain that very few people know their best friends, and fewer still have the wisdom to cleave to them through thick and thin, with all their hearts and souls. An intense hatred of everything French was the natural result of Miss Piper's painful experience. She even dropped the language from her prospectus, which was no great loss to anybody, to be sure.

Mathilde being provided for, Mrs. Withers naturally turned her attention to Polly's matrimonial future. "A Prince next time," she thought. "Nothing lower." She gave herself the trouble of studying Polly in this connection, and of "sounding her,"

and alas, discovered her secret! Polly's furious opposition to all foreigners and foreign marriages might have passed for prejudice but for Polly's blushes and smiles and general trepidation when a certain American was around, and without a word to her daughter, Mrs. Withers planned a course of action which should "stamp it out."

There were no more painting lessons now, and when Mr. De Trobriand called, either the butler said that "Miss Withers was out, but that madame was receiving," or that "madame was not receiving," or that "the ladies were in London," or that somebody was ill, or that they were lunching or breakfasting or dining, or "particularly engaged." There was no getting inside that house on any pretext whatever. Poor John left about a bushel of cards for "the ladies," which the butler, acting under orders, promptly consigned to the waste-paper basket. John then tried writing notes and sending books and bouquets. But these, too, never got beyond the porter's lodge. He hung about the hotel afterward until the servants first made jokes about it, and then got to feeling so sorry for him that they quite longed — the women, at least — to give him some hope and help.

But Mrs. Withers's eagle eye and Mrs. Withers's imperious temper made themselves so much felt below stairs, and Mrs. Withers's service was so lucrative and satisfactory, both as to wages and perquisites, that nobody dared to defy or deceive her. So Polly, all at once, was as completely separated from her sweetheart by worldly conventions and devices as if the Atlantic had rolled between them; and matters

being at that stage where she could do nothing herself, from delicacy and maidenly reserve, that could look like seeking Mr. De Trobriand, the poor girl could only fret and mope and pine, and pine and fret and mope, lose flesh, lose sleep, lose even her good looks, at a rate that one would have declared impossible. She knew nothing of John's attempts to reach and communicate with her, of his nocturnal prowls which had aroused the suspicions of the police, of his vexation and desperation.

And she felt as forlorn as she looked, consequently, which is saying a great deal. She wrote him a decorous little note and sent it by Tringat, asking him to send her palette and color-box, explaining that her mother did not wish her to paint any more this season. And Tringat brought back all her things, but no reply from Mr. De Trobriand. She sent M. Deschamps some delicious hot-house grapes, with another note, by one of the footmen, when she got the chance, and got a profusely grateful, touched letter, dated from the studio, in which he tried to thank her for her unselfish remembrance of "a grumbling, ailing old man," — but he did not so much as mention John.

She went to the Bois, to the Place de la Concorde, to the English water-color exhibit: John did the same; but in a city like Paris two people might play at hide and seek for years in this way and never find each other. So it happened that three months passed, four, and neither of the attached and woebegone ones had caught so much as one glimpse of the other. Worse, — the seeds of doubt had been sown between them.

"If he cared for me as much as he seemed to, he would not leave me like this," argued Polly not unnaturally, with a red spot of shame and distress in each of her round cheeks.

"Now that her sister is a Marquise, she has no eyes for a poor artist," thought John, "and I am given my *congé*." An unsuspected streak of surliness made him miserable when he saw by the papers that Mrs. Withers had rented a charming château near Fontainebleu, and had given a *fête* that had cost ten thousand pounds. He gloomily devoured all the details — of how the lake was illumined; of how the bosques were filled with Tyrolean singers concealed from view; of how the château was decorated with orchids and pond lilies; of the royal fireworks, the orchestra of a hundred men, the columns of ice in the ball-room, reaching to the ceiling; of the miles of marquees and the army of servants in powder; of "the gay motes in the sunbeam of fashion," the counts, dukes, barons, royalties, savants, beauties present; of Mlle. Marie's grace and beauty, "only unmarried daughter of this American Crœsus."

Poor John flung away the paper in an access of disgust and set his foot upon it, not thinking or knowing that Polly's only interest, her time, and all her most adroit efforts at that *fête* were directed to one end, — trying to find out something about John. The only thing she heard was from Mrs. De Trobriand's cousin, that John had become a perfect bear, and that she never saw him,

"Why aren't they here?" asked that lady innocently in return.

"They were — I don't know — I suppose mamma overlooked them," replied Polly.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Ambassador, with considerable asperity.

Sitting in a Tyrolean inn, Mr. Withers even more gloomily read of his wife's "enchanting entertainment." He had been making a little tour in Germany, and had there tried some baths in the mountains. "Liz will ruin me yet, rich as I am, if I don't look out," he thought. "What is she up to now, I wonder? If any of these kings around here would only step down and out, she would move heaven and earth but what she'd have that throne. And I guess she'd do the royal business about as well as any of them. She is a wonderful woman — wonderful! I must go and see Wallace and get back as soon as I can. I'm going to take *him* home with me, any way, and put him to work. I'll take Europe out of him fast enough, when I get him to New York. I'll Europe him; I'll roast him every day for a year, if I find him like that Mongolfier man-monkey, — not worth his salt. She would n't give that thing while I was in Paris, and she has n't said a word about it in her letters. All this foreign rambling and scrambling and splurging is a mighty poor investment, — a mighty poor investment. It don't yield a cent on the dollar for any American. The only stock it puts up to bubble quotations is the Mongolfier mines. I guess I'll be pumping water out of his shaft and supplying machinery as long as he lives, — mining in hard bake with a pewter spoon, too, for *he'll* be no use

and give no end of trouble, and pan out the poorest sort of quartz. It takes a mint to run that kind of mine. It beats me what Liz and Matilda want with a man like that in the family. Liz says I ought to be gratified by the 'stand' she has taken over here and the 'standing' she has got. And it does sort of amuse me sometimes to see Liz and her hotel and her servants and her fine friends, and think how we begun. But I am not satisfied and I am not gratified, and I am going to take them all home before any more of them get spoiled or marry dagoes. Dagoes? Why, if Mongolfier was only a dago, I could set him up in the fruit business and run it myself behind the scenes, and *make* him earn a living for his family. But as it is, I shall just be shelling out gold pieces as fast as they come in, nearly. It makes me sick to hear them all talk about 'restoring' that old castle of Mongolfier's in Brittany. I know what that means, well enough. Does he suppose I have been slaving for thirty years for *him?* If he can manage to restore his castle on what they have got, well and good, — but I 'm not building, buying, or 'restoring' any castles just now, I can tell him. If he treats Matilda right, and all of us as he ought to, I 'll see that they have plenty after I 'm gone; but one thing is certain: I am not the man to take off my clothes before I go to bed. If Liz likes to splurge, that 's another thing. She is my wife, and though it seems to me all foolishness, I 'm not going to say anything to her as long as she keeps in bounds. The money is *there*, and I 've got no use for it, now that it 's made, and it

makes itself pretty much now, so she can go ahead till I say 'stop.' But if that Mongolfier thinks that I am the treasury at Washington, and that all he has to do is to shovel out as fast as I shovel in, he will find that he never was more mistaken in all his life."

Mr. Withers posted back to Paris, accordingly, after a visit to Heidelberg that to him was gall and wormwood, for there he renewed his acquaintance with his son, and finding in him every evidence of folly and dissipation, false standards, extravagant habits, European vices without European virtues, he peremptorily arranged that Wallace should leave the university in a few weeks and accompany him to America. Meanwhile Polly had continued to languish in a green and yellow melancholy, from which she was very effectually roused by the news that they were all going home. Going home! Going three thousand miles and more from Paris, — from *John!* What could be more fearful!

"Oh, popper, you don't mean it! I won't go!" she exclaimed, when she heard it; and on his saying harshly (for that Polly should not be willing to go back with him was really worst of all), "Oh, very well; do as you please; we sail on the 20th," she burst into tears and ran out of the room.

"This comes of educating children out of their own country and away from their father," he thought bitterly. "I did think that Polly would prefer to be at home with me, but it seems I am mistaken. What good does all this money do me, any way? I wish I had always been a poor man. Then I might

at least have had a home, and a companionable wife, and affectionate, sensible children. My money has been a curse to my family."

A few days later, while both Polly and her father were suffering from a strained relation, the result of her frankness, they came into Paris together to do a little shopping; and that done, they went to the Louvre to have a look at Polly's favorite Murillo, she said. It is to be hoped that she told the truth, or a part of it, on that occasion. She certainly took her father from picture to picture, and settled down with him on a divan in front of that celebrated canvas, but she certainly remembered that this was John's favorite picture too. It had been his before it became hers. They had looked at it a little and at each other a great deal on several occasions, while John talked of its merits and beauties with the keenest appreciation; and it may well be that Polly had a faint hope of encountering John there again. It is certain that she had just affected to be terribly tired and absolutely in need of rest, and was just beginning to feel her way to a reconciliation with her father, when she turned her head, and yes, there he was, walking down the room with his mother! Her bright, eager, pleading glance crossed another, proud and sad. Polly rose and approached Mrs. De Trobriand.

"It is so long since I saw you. I am so sorry, but Paris is such a place for losing people," she blurted out, as she timidly shook hands with John's mother and then with John. John was savage, John was very sore about the heart, anybody could see

that. "We are going away, going back to America, and I've come to see our Murillo again and say good-by to it," said Polly, looking again at John, and giving a plaintive glance backward at her picture that seemed to include all her past with John.

That look did what nothing else could have done, and spoke volumes. It said far more plainly than words: "It has not been my fault. I am true to you. I can't help being a rich girl. I am not responsible for mamma's treatment of you. I cannot bear to leave you. How can you treat me so harshly?" As the young people stood there facing each other, Mrs. De Trobriand filled the awkward pause with a little speech full of an undercurrent of elation.

"I am glad to see you again, Miss Withers," she said. "I very rarely go out nowadays, and I should have been very sorry not to see you again before you sailed. You are glad to go, no doubt; but I do not expect to see America for many years. My son has just won the *prix de Rome*, — you may have heard it? — and we are going to Italy together next winter to give ourselves to art entirely."

"Oh, are you?" cried Polly, turning impulsively to John and flushing crimson. "I am so glad. I knew you could; I knew you would. Come, tell me all about it!" Under such a blush and speech and invitation, John's wrath melted like snow in August. His hungry heart was longing for so much as a bone, and lo, this unexpected feast! So down the pair sat on the nearest seats, and proceeded to devour

each other as only lovers and ogres can. Mrs. De Trobriand, turning, discovered Mr. Withers, and he, rising, invited her to sit beside him, with a "What 's this about your son?"

Thus launched, it is hard to say which of the ladies had most to say. On the subject of John Mrs. De Trobriand was always more eloquent than Castelar. His talent, his energy, his unselfishness, his devotion to his work and his mother, his special and general perfections, gifts, and graces, formed a theme that called forth all her powers, and she had for an audience Polly's father. The result was that the pair had a long, satisfactory, sympathetic talk, which created between them a very real bond. "That Mrs. De Trobriand is the nicest and the most sensible woman I 've met for many a day. I like her better than anybody I 've met over here," Mr. Withers had said of her at the wedding, and had drifted into corners with her, and seen altogether so much of her that his wife had actually teased him about it.

Meanwhile Polly and John were decidedly not allowing grass to grow under their feet. In five minutes it was as if they were again back at M. Deschamps's studio. In ten she had poured out all that she had felt and suffered in their estrangement, and they had metaphorically fallen upon each other's bosoms, and resolved never to be parted again by any power under the sun. In fifteen more he had put before her all his plans and ambitions for the future, and she had laid them away tenderly in her heart for future thought, while giving him all pos-

sible present sympathy. Then the question of Polly's going away came up ; and when she said, "They are taking me away!" (from you *sous entendu*), John could n't stand that, of course. It gave him the courage and manliness to declare himself then and there, and got for him as sweet an answer as any girl's lips ever formed.

"We must be going," cried Mrs. De Trobriand, when even she felt that it might be just possible for the subject of "John" to pall upon an outsider like Mr. Withers after a half hour devoted exclusively to it. "But are you in for the day? Why not come and take lunch with us before you go out? You 'll be very near your station, and I can give you a glorified pumpkin pie that will remind you of home. Thankful makes them for us. She came with us from New England and cooks for us, and despises what she calls 'these French messes.'"

"So do I," said Mr. Withers heartily.

"Oh, popper, *do!* Can't we?" urged Polly, and it was agreed that they should report at the De Trobriands' in an hour. When the mother and son had disappeared, Polly sank back in her seat by her father and ran her arm through his. Then she looked all around, and seeing that the gallery was empty, she took her courage in her hands. "This is my chance," she thought. "I 'll tell popper and get him on my side."

Tell him she did, therefore, beginning with, "Dearest father, that 's John De Trobriand, and he loves me and I love him. And that 's why I did n't want to go home. *Please* forgive your Polly."

Mr. Withers looked down at Polly, who laid her cheek against his shoulder and squeezed his hand hard. There were tears in his eyes. "He 'll never have your place, darling, but — I — I "—

"Hum! Hum!" commented Mr. Withers. That was all, but he smoothed Polly's hair, and she felt that the battle was won.

Mr. Withers certainly heard enough of "John" that day, for now it was Polly who took up the subject, and in her glowing hands it assumed the shape of a creature so great and good, so faultless, so irresistible, that by comparison the mother's account bore about the relation of a water-color to a Rubens. Between them they had reached Mr. Withers's heart, and succeeded beyond their fondest expectations. But when Polly impulsively embraced him, saying, "He is just the sort of man you 'd like me to marry, is n't he, dear, — a hard-working, talented, splendid *American*. You will befriend us with mamma, won't you? She wants me to marry a foreigner with a title, but I just *won't!* I 'm going to marry my darling John — or nobody at all!" he was very cautious.

"Well, we 'll see, — we 'll see, Polly. You are very young. And he 's got nothing. We will see what sort of stuff he 's made of, first. I don't want you to go marrying any artist. I don't want to see you marry anybody for ten or twelve years," he said.

"Ten or twelve years! Oh, *popper!*" protested Polly vehemently. And then she prudently held her peace. She saw that he was not angry. She

felt that he would take her part, and when he said, "Here, find your parasol and let 's be off. So *that 's* the reason you did n't want to go home with your old father! Well, it is natural. That is natural," Polly rejoiced greatly, and skipped along by his side as happy as she looked. She saw that he liked being told of it, that he was digesting it. She knew that he hated nothing so much as being deceived. She felt that he would know John, — and who could resist John? Who could help loving John and giving him anything he wanted?

So the little luncheon was a great success. John was so pleased with Polly and Polly with John, and Mrs. De Trobriand with them both, and Mr. Withers with himself and them all, that it could scarcely be otherwise. The meal was very simple and simply served. It was set on the table sourly, with quite a bang, by Thankful, put out by "company," she being not nearly as good as her pies, though quite as flat and thin. But Polly and John tasted of nectar and ambrosia that day. Mrs. De Trobriand's motherly and womanly qualities made a deep impression on Mr. Withers, who, when he saw her get up to bring on the clean plates and whipped cream, grunted out, "I 'm glad to get rid of all those parrots my wife 's got around the table. I like this."

Her indulgent smile fell like a caress upon the lovers, who did have the grace to spare a few words and looks to their parents. Mr. Withers ate nearly the entire pie, and grew more benevolent with every mouthful. Mrs. De Trobriand unconsciously completed the conquest she had made by washing up

the luncheon dishes herself. Polly wiped them, with many arch glances at her John. And the entire party burst into a fit of laughter when Thankful came in, looking like a thunder cloud, and demanded to know what they meant by doing her work, refusing absolutely to be propitiated by Mrs. De Trobriand's mild "We thought you had to go out, Thankful, and that we would leave everything in order."

"I have n't enjoyed myself as much anywhere since I came to Paris," was Mr. Withers's remark to Polly, when they found themselves in the street. "They are poor, but they 've got grit. They 'll do." Polly was perfectly delighted. Was not everything going beautifully? Had not Mrs. De Trobriand kissed her like a daughter as she left? Had not John given her the loveliest rose in the world?

"Is n't she charming? And is n't *John* the handsomest fellow! And such a good son, popper. I knew you 'd like them!" she asked her father eagerly, and he replied by a repetition of his former remark, "They 'll do. They 've got grit."

Next to money, grit was the thing that Mr. Withers most respected.

Mrs. Withers knit her black brows ominously when she heard of the day's outing, and when she got her husband alone, she scolded him roundly for accepting the invitation, and told him all her fears.

"Have n't you any more sense than to go out of your way to encourage Polly in a piece of folly like that? Don't you know that she might give us

a great deal of trouble about that young fellow? I never allow any but the most eligible men to approach her. And the little fool fancies herself in love with him, too. But as to her marrying him, that she shall never do — never," she stormed, as she walked up and down her long bedroom. "I have been all this spring keeping them apart, and here you have spoilt it all by your want of worldly knowledge. You are all right in Wall Street, but you are a perfect idiot in such matters. Luckily we are going home, and I'll take care that she never sees or hears from *him* again. Once I get her on the other side of the Atlantic, I'll take that nonsense out of Miss Polly, I can tell you, fast enough."

In most things Mr. Withers was wax in his wife's hands. But he sometimes rebelled, and he rebelled now. He did not like to hear Polly called a fool and himself an idiot. He was not pleased to be considered wanting in everything but ability to make the money he saw lavished in every conceivable extravagance and luxury, while his own personal expenses never amounted to more than fifteen hundred a year. He rose and confronted his wife sternly. The innocent joy he had witnessed that day still warmed his heart. Why should Polly's happiness count for nothing? All at once he made John's cause his own.

"Lizzie," he said, "you seem to me more bent on having your own way than anything else, and gratifying your ambition. Now, look here! You have married Matilda off to suit yourself, and I don't think much of your choice, let me tell you.

Leave Polly to me. I forbid you to interfere in this matter from this time on."

Mr. Withers so rarely forbade anything that his wife knew at once that she had to yield, or appear to yield.

"Very well, I wash my hands of the whole affair," she said. "You must take the entire responsibility. And if Polly marries badly, you will have only yourself to blame, remember." But she thought to herself, "Just wait till I get to Washington!" for she had determined not to go back to New York again. When John, with many nervous tremors, presented himself in Mr. Withers's library, and in a few simple words asked for Polly, he was infinitely relieved to find himself kindly received, and his claims conditionally allowed. They might consider themselves engaged, they might correspond, and if John's "record" warranted it, they might in two years marry. John was delighted, and showed it.

"It is very generous of you, very good of you, sir. I shall never forget it," he declared. "And I do hope, sir, that you understand that I am not after your money. I don't want a cent of it."

"More fool you," growled Mr. Withers, with a glance at John's red face.

"I want *Polly*," continued John, "and I shall not ask for her until I can support her."

Mr. Withers nodded.

"That's all right. You'll do."

"Can I see her now, sir? And may I come with you to Liverpool?" urged John.

"You can send for her. Ring that bell, won't

you? But you must get your plans settled and your parting over right here and now. I don't want you hanging around us on the ship," announced Mr. Withers.

So Polly was sent for, and flew at her father and kissed him about a dozen times, and perched on his lap, and thanked him right prettily. Then she made him shake hands with John. Then she was made aware by private signals that John desired a private interview, and led the way to the next room. There she heard her father's fiat, and the pair talked and talked, and perhaps kissed each other, and cried together, and John got the size of Polly's finger, and somehow in the course of two hours they managed to part. When the Olympus dropped down the Mersey, Polly was sitting on deck with her face turned, like Mary Stuart's, to the same *cher pays de France*, a very bright little turquoise on her finger, in her lap a letter full of "forget-me-nots," and in her heart, "*Adieu! te quitter, c'est mourir!*"

CHAPTER XII

Long before they reached Norway, the Marquise de Mongolfier discovered that she had drawn the blankest blank that even the matrimonial lottery could turn out; instead of the glittering prize that she had supposed was represented by a French title and coronet, Mongolfier, she found, was selfish to the last degree. If there was a comfortable chair, he took it; a nice dish, he ate it; a new book, he read it. His devotion to himself was amazing. But his wife was his chattel; he required from her the most slavish obedience and endless services.

He lectured her about the duties of a wife with the most impressive air of virtue possible for a human being to assume. A wife should have no will of her own, no time of her own, no wishes of her own, no plans of her own, — above all, no money of her own. He took possession of her as if she were a conquered country, and demanded perpetual tribute. He adopted a tone of brutal marital frankness toward her that wounded her self-love intensely. He hectored, he bullied, he criticised, he commanded; he snubbed her personally, ridiculed her country, abused her father. When asked what had become of his ante-nuptial attentions, he replied: —

"Madame, do not be absurd. Would you have a husband *faire la cour* forever? *Ma foi, non!*

It is now your turn to dance when I clap the hands." Nor was this all. There was a pretty French actress on board, with whom he at once inaugurated a red-hot flirtation. All his mornings and afternoons were given to her, indeed, and not to poor Matilda, sick in her berth, and consigned wholly to her maid and the stewardess. On deck Mongolfier was raffoling about *la grande passion*, and representing himself as the slave of woman, a volcano, a mismatched victim of the American yearning for aristocratic alliances. Downstairs there was certainly one day in which, her maid being ill and the stewardess busy, the spoiled darling of an American home was left without any care or attention whatever, without so much as her dinner. And then it was small comfort to be addressed obsequiously as Madame la Marquise and receive the profuse apologies of the steward, instead of the loving inquiries of a good husband.

Mongolfier's breezy "*Etes-vous là?*" when he came down — as if she could very well be anywhere else — was received in sullen silence. But he did not care; not he. His evenings he gave to the real mistress of his heart, — play.

"A woman is like a beefsteak. The more you thump her, the tenderer she grows," says Thackeray, and, strange to say, Matilda soon developed into a wife of this spaniel type; but not without many a sigh and tear and groan. She learned to fetch and carry, she learned to hold her tongue, she grew to be intensely thankful for the smallest possible favors. She gave up all idea of having her own way. She

even got to the point of looking on with a stereotyped, wan smile at the affair between Mongolfier and Mlle. Fifine of the Théatre Comique. In other words, the marquis took up what he called his *position fixe*, — the whip-hand, and no lack of cat-tails on occasion; in public a pronounced deference, many bows, any amount of French polish; in private the knout matrimonial.

Matilda made the best fight she could for her money, for money she knew was one kind of power. Many and pathetic were her artifices and devices to keep at least a respectable share of pin-money from the handsome sum given her by her father. But Mongolfier was more than a match for her in everything. He got every franc of that three hundred thousand dollars eventually, and in three weeks' time was doling out to her, with much grumbling and many warnings against extravagance, the smallest possible sums for her necessary expenses. He examined all her bills when they were sent to Christiania, and paid her dressmaker himself, dismissed her maid, and made himself actively objectionable in a thousand different ways, — so much so that Matilda wept herself sick, and wished herself back in America and simple Miss Withers twenty times a day, at least.

Mongolfier in economy emphatically drew the line at his wife's expenditures. He denied himself nothing. And he gave Mlle. Fifine the handsomest of his wife's diamond bracelets, not to mention *petits soupers* without number, drives, pleasure parties of every kind. While the Withers family were

wondering how Matilda was and where she was, and how she liked Norway and Sweden, not dreaming that she was already one of the most miserable women in either of those countries, there were some other people quite as anxious about and as interested in Mongolfier from far different motives; namely, his creditors.

They wrote to him, telegraphed him, threatened him, implored him, appealed to him in six languages, at least; but for one thing that the coarsest and harshest of them all knew about collecting a debt, Mongolfier knew ten about not paying it. His position was that of Sheridan: it was not his interest to pay the principal; it was against his principle to pay the interest. His debts weighed lightly enough upon him at any time, but now that he had a multi-millionaire *beau-père* whom he expected to squeeze mercilessly through his daughter, they did not give him a moment's anxiety.

He scattered profuse promises abundantly when obliged to take some action, and pointed out that it was beneath him to settle a beggarly bill for fifty thousand francs when he could "draw for a million dollars" whenever he liked. And credit is so often actually preferred to cash in Europe, wherever there is any prospect of plucking a pigeon with great expectations, that the mere fact of his having married Matilda quieted, as nothing else could have done, the important money-lenders, and the tradesmen Mongolfier had been gulling successfully for years. There were few things he enjoyed so much. Matilda found him roaring over a letter that he found

awaiting him at the Hôtel d'Allemagne in Stockholm; and surprised to see him so cheerful, — for his temper had been made irritable in the extreme by fifteen years of high play, and the vicissitudes and vices of what he was pleased to call (with an odious smirk of complaisance) his *vie orageuse*, — she timidly asked what he found so amusing.

"It is this idiot, Tremault! — *ma foi*, what a dolt! I owe him a fortune. I have never paid him a sou! And behold! he implores me not to transfer my custom to any one else, and offers to send a special messenger here for the orders of monsieur, his valued patron," he cried, flipping the letter with finger and thumb. "*Eh bien, mon Tremault*, you shall have them. That I tell you. That I promise. And you will find that I keep the promise. Oh, *oui!* I keep the promise. *Mais oui!* One must not disappoint an honest man" —

"But why don't you pay him? You have got all the money," asked Mathilde.

"My friend, think not of these things. It is all very well for the *bourgeoisie* to pay the debt. *Mais pour Mongolfier? Décidément pas!* It is an absurd American prejudice, yours," he replied.

"Well, father pays all his bills every month; I know that," Mathilde pouted.

"Mathilde, you are becoming insolent as well as absurd. Give me the millions of monsieur your father and I too would — No, I would n't, either! *Pas si bête!*" he concluded, with an irrepressible burst of sincerity, after which he fell to waxing the huge mustache which he said the women so admired *en*

grenadier. "All the world spoils Mongolfier," he said, with a hideous grin at the reflection in his shaving-glass. "Is it my fault? The women pursue me; the tradesmen will have it to say that they serve me, the ambitious youths dress after me, the" — This would certainly have been a long and eloquent sentence had not Matilda waxed impatient over it, and sweeping by caught her sleeve in the jug of hot water he had at hand and upset it.

"That for your awkwardness, *imbécile!*" stormed Mongolfier, throwing a boot-jack promptly at her head. "And get out of here, nor dare to enter this room again when you find me shaving. Don't stand there staring, or you'll get worse. Do you hear? Go!"

Yes, already it had come to this. And it is to the tender mercies of a Mongolfier that many American mothers are so anxious to confide their daughters, — those gentlemanly, polished, irreproachable *flâneurs*, the devil's refuse, who in forty cases out of fifty take an American heiress as they would a prescription, to be well shaken after and not before the ceremony, and treated with less courtesy, less kindness than any other creature in the world, — for so do they interpret the marriage service after Beelzebub.

When this amiable ornament of the French aristocracy tired of Sweden, he made his way to St. Petersburg, and proceeded to install in one of its handsomest hotels Mlle. Fifine, whom he had persuaded to relinquish what she always called "the divine career." His wife he put at a second-rate *Pension* on a back street of the Russian capital, and visited

but seldom, — generally, when he had lost some great sum of money to Prince Thisitaky or General Thatotherky and felt the need of casting an anchor to the windward. Of course Mathilde got to know of this model continental arrangement for keeping the domestic peace, and naturally she bitterly resented it. But she was not the woman to take a tiger by the throat; she temporized.

"Mongolfier," she said meekly, "you miss that bright Mlle. Leroy that you saw so much of in Stockholm, do you not? Was she so charming?"

"A handsome devil, — but amusing! but amusing!"

"She is here," said Mathilde. "I saw her yesterday."

"*Vraiment?*" remarked the Marquis.

"That is very strange," said Mathilde. "What can have brought her to St. Petersburg when she had an engagement at Stockholm?"

"She has found that she can do better here. Oh, trust her for that! She is a daughter of the horseleech, that woman! She wants, as you Americans say, the earth. *C'est bon cas.* It is the only evidence of *esprit* I ever knew of your stupid money-grabbers."

"Yes, she is here," repeated Matilda, slowly eyeing her husband as she spoke.

"You surprise me. I must look her up," he replied.

"Mongolfier, you need not think you are deceiving me. I know all about it. You have brought her to St. Petersburg and put her at the Hôtel d'Europe, and put me *here*. How dare you treat me so?

How dare you?" sobbed Matilda, bursting into a flood of tears.

Mongolfier set his teeth. He glared at his wife. He rose from the sofa on which he had been stretched and grasped her by the arm firmly, — so firmly, indeed, that she shrieked aloud.

"Fool! idiot! insupportable nuisance!" he cried. "Do you want to deprive me of *everything?* I have given up everything for *you*. I have given you, an American nobody, my name, my position, my liberty. What more do you want?" He shook the arm he grasped with every count of the indictment against his wife. "Do you think to interfere with my pleasures?" Poor Matilda quailed before him, for he was furiously angry, and his air was that of virtuous amazement. "Speak! answer! of what do you complain?" he roared like a bull of Bashan. "Tell me."

"*Pleasures!* Are n't you ashamed?" cried Matilda. "I won't stand it; I won't, I say! I shall write my father." She touched the right chord that time. Mongolfier's whole expression changed. His hold relaxed. He seated himself, and tried to draw her on his knee. "Come, my cat," he said soothingly, *sois raisonnable.* Is it that *grisette* Fifine? *Eh bien!* You, too, shall come with us to the Hôtel d'Europe. You will find the *cuisine* excellent, and the company unusually select and agreeable." Bayard never felt that he had acted more nobly than did Mongolfier when he made this handsome proposition.

"I won't go to the same house with that woman. I won't do it, not if you *kill* me for it," sobbed

Matilda, as she broke away from him and retired to the window.

"Madame, you will do as I say," said the Marquis calmly. "Ring for the chambermaid to help you pack; at once, do you hear? You will do always as I say. I, Mongolfier, declare this." And she did as he said, arriving that afternoon at her new quarters, a pale creature, with her eyes swelled out of her head, almost, and but a flash of sullen recognition for Mlle. Fifine, strange to say, when she met her in the hall.

"*Que les Américaines sont drôles*," remarked that lively young person to Mongolfier, who was looking on. "*C'est très mauvais goût.*"

"*Vous avez raison! Bien bête! Bien bête!*" agreed that model gentleman and spouse. "Let's have a cigarette in peace now, *mon ange*. She was a little troublesome, but you know the motto of my house, *Gars qui me touche?* I flatter myself that I am a match for any woman. *J'ai la main de fer* with women, — and that is worth fifty pairs of velvet gloves."

"In dealing with a wife, — *peut-être!*" qualified this typical specimen of the French angel, and the precious pair laughed, and turned to more agreeable themes: the gossip of the hotel, notably of how the Princesse Kroupanoffski's diamonds were in pawn; of how young Hoffhausen had been reduced to the ranks by the Czar for an impertinence (a court blunder worse than a crime); of Colonel Smolenski's newly acquired fortune and fondness for play.

Much entertained were they by this dish of scandal, and neither of them troubled their heads in the least about the poor girl who was sitting in her room reflecting, in utter dejection of spirits, upon the many pains and penalties of international marriages between races speaking not only a different language, but not understanding each other in the least, and separated from each other by a thousand prejudices, principles, ideas, feelings, conventions, that increase all the ordinary risks of marriage between a man and woman of the same race a millionfold.

To write home? That meant her family knowing, and through them all the world knowing, that her grand alliance was a ghastly failure, and her pride would not be so humiliated. She could hear in imagination her mother compassionating her, and lamenting "the sad fate of my daughter the Marquise de Mongolfier." She could imagine the sneers and comments of a not too sympathetic world. To defy Mongolfier and claim her money? Impossible. To go away and leave him? But where and how could she support herself?

These alternatives she turned over in her mind, one by one, and then ended, as all slaves bound by the fetters of fate or circumstance do, by sinking down hopelessly under the inevitable, the unescapable. Katrine, the little slavey of that floor, was shocked to find madame at ten o'clock that night without fire, an untasted dinner beside her, her face in her hands, still bowed down beneath her load of care. "I will not go down to *table d'hôte* alone,

and be pointed out and laughed at as an abandoned wife," she had resolved. "Even the servants will make a joke of it." She kept her room accordingly, and got more pale, more wretched, every day; more sullen, too, and unreconciled to her position.

From her window she could see Mongolfier starting off with a choice collection of Russian princes for a drive in his drag, with Fifine on the box seat. If she stole away for a little cheer and shopping, what should she come upon but Mongolfier choosing and presenting to a lady whom he called "Mlle. L'Autre" (a Polish girl of great beauty) a set of magnificent furs, — though he had found fault with her that very morning for buying a three pound box of bonbons. Did she go to the theatre, there was Mongolfier in a box with one or both of his resplendent charmers, while she had only Katrine for an escort. And as for her nights, they were made hideous to her by the perpetual rattle of the dice-boxes, the cries, bets, oaths, that came from the room adjoining, in which Mongolfier and his "friends" were liberally staking the hard-won money which her father had so cleverly earned and so generously given away.

It is needless to say that her husband grew more weary of her every day, more bored by her society, if the silent presence of a sullen woman can be called society, more recklessly neglectful of her and shamefully indifferent to her comfort and welfare. He came in one day and emptied his pockets of a great heap of bank-notes and gold. "All mine," he said. "Not a sou of it the money of that re-

spectable ass, your father. Still pale, madame, still angry, I see. What will you? Have you not here every comfort? Of what do you complain, *dites moi?*" He approached her and her pallor increased, and with it his contempt, for he had no sympathy for cowardice whatever, being full of brute courage himself.

"Nothing, Mongolfier, nothing," said the poor cowed creature. "Only don't stay long in Russia. Let us go back to France; I have friends there; I am so lonely here. When shall we return to Paris?"

"Not for some time. Not until I get even with Lemidorff. There is no haste. Why can't you be contented here? And look you, Mathilde, when we go back, I shall restore the old château in Brittany, and we shall need money, — but money, money, money! You must write to *monsieur le beau-père*," said Mongolfier.

"I shall do nothing of the sort, Mongolfier!" snapped Mathilde angrily. "What have you done with all that money he gave me, to use for my pleasure and comfort? I will not write, I say!"

"What, the wife defies the husband? You will write! Do you hear, you will write! Behold my *position fixe!*"

"I won't ask for a cent," repeated Mathilde, with what looked like firmness.

But up rose Mongolfier with great suddenness, and, seizing her chin, he forced back her head and glared at her white face until it grew almost deathly in its fixed pallor.

"You will write!" he reiterated, with a world of hatred compressed in his tone.

"Oh, Mongolfier, let me go! Are you going to *murder* me? Yes, yes, of course I will write; I was only jesting," cried the thoroughly frightened woman.

"Now, this minute! Here, I will see you do it; I will read it; I will post it," declared he. And under these delightful circumstances, the poor girl sat down and wrote a breezy, insincere letter to her mother, containing an account of their travels, and inclosed a note for her father asking for money to restore the ancient family seat of the illustrious Mongolfiers. "*C'est ça*," commented her husband, pocketing the missive when she had finished, and went out to give orders that all the other letters written by madame while at that hotel should be brought to him. It was not until he had lost a cool seventy thousand dollars of the Withers money to the astute Lemidorff that Mongolfier got his fill of Russia and all things Russian.

"We go to Paris, madame; it is the only place in the world fit to live in. De Staël was right when she said she had rather see the gutters of the Rue du Bac than the Bay of Naples. These Russian bears are not only Tartars, but thieves. Confound them all! May they rot in purgatory for a thousand years!" he announced to his wife, and his speech brought her great relief. In Paris there were the duchess and the priests and the Sisters and many Americans. It would be hard if, among them all, they could not keep Mongolfier in better order.

And at least she would be rid of Fifine, and protected, she thought, and if things got worse, she could slip off to America. Her heart beat high, her hands trembled, as the idea came into her head; then, "*A quoi pensez-vous, madame?*" came in Mongolfier's most acrid tones, and she dissembled with a hasty, —

"I am glad to go because you like Paris so much, dear, that is all." When a woman flies to a lie like a rat to his hole, as Charles Reade declares the gentle sex has a way of doing, it always means that there is a huge mouser on the hearth outside waiting to devour her, — with whiskers waxed *au grenadier* in this case. She got an answer to her letters home before she left. It was from Mrs. Withers, who wrote: —

"I have not given your father that note; it would be useless. But I will send Mongolfier money myself, from time to time, for the purpose, tell him. We will make that château the handsomest in France. You had best not allude to the subject in writing home just now. Later, your father will do more for you. I have sounded him for you. Is Mongolfier as fond of Hannah More as ever? And does he read aloud to you every evening?"

"*Ma foi! non. Cette vieille Anglaise m'a presque tué! Pouf! pif! paf! Ne m'en parlez-vous pas, jamais!* I burned the whole set. Before I was married, — yes, I was *obligé*. But *ciel! après?* Your mother, has she the good sense? Knows she not the difference between *avant* and *après* in marriage?" demanded Mongolfier, when he read it,

making the liveliest play with his eyeglasses. "But she sends money, she sends *money*. *Bon! bon! Elle vaut mille Hannah Mores et Maria Edgeworths, cette belle-mère.*" His Mathilde had certainly learned the difference between *avant* and *après* in marriage, and she held her peace. But she privately determined to make Mongolfier share that money with her when the check came. "He shall not have it *all*," she vowed.

CHAPTER XIII

When the Mongolfiers reached Paris, Monsieur le Marquis seemed a great deal more contented, and Mathilde, appealing to his sister, was surprised to find that the duchess took her part warmly. "*C'est un peu trop*," that lady exclaimed when she heard of the honeymoon, and, sending for her brother, she took him aside and gave him to understand that unless he behaved better, now that he was *rangé*, his family would have nothing more to do with him whatever. Mathilde's confessor had a word with the gentleman as well, and pointed out that conduct so disgraceful was far more of an injury to Monsieur le Marquis than to his wife even, and sure to divert from him the Withers inheritance.

So for a while Mongolfier, with his creditors also on the war-path, so far bridled the natural cad and *vaurien* that had been grafted upon an honorable old stock in his person, that he treated his wife with some civility. But there was no further talk of restoring the château. Mrs. Withers's check, however, was promptly cashed, and found its way into another bank, sporting a *croupier* instead of a cashier.

It was not long before Paris became as distasteful to Mongolfier as Paris ever can become to a Parisian. And then began a series of wanderings

extending over two years, and embracing the whole Continent, — a dismal, terrible experience for this poor American girl, dragged from pillar to post and always and everywhere neglected, disgraced, abused. Her little baby was born at Monaco, and brought some comfort to its mother's heart; but if it had not been for a German lady, who at that time chanced to be stopping in the same hotel, Mathilde would never have lived through the two congestive chills that followed. That excellent mother and wife took possession of the sick woman, and nursed, coaxed, fed, scolded, bullied her fairly back into living and suffering, instead of slipping away from a sad world and a bad husband, as she was rapidly doing when Frau Hochzeiter first tapped at her door.

Mongolfier was away, and did not know that he had a daughter until it was a week old, and then his disgust was so great and so shamelessly expressed that Frau Hochzeiter lost her temper with him completely, and hurled a sentence at him so long and with such a vigorous verb at the end of it, that he actually beat a hasty retreat, with this sentence ringing in his ears: —

"Yes, if France goes on producing men like you, Monsieur, — bad citizens, bad husbands, bad fathers, — she will have Sedan and Sedan and Sedan always and forever. You Frenchmen think it a fine thing, a witty thing, a clever thing, to be godless *roués* and blacklegs and cheats. You call us Germans stupid. When you learn to be pious, honest, virtuous, we shall respect your wisdom and not before. As for

you, an honest sweep is more noble far than such a Marquis. No German foot but treads so! — on such a dungheap! Had you never a *mother?*"

If there is a divine spot or the remembrance of one in any Frenchman's heart, that word "mother" is sure to reach it, and Mongolfier's usual strut was considerably modified as he made his way down the broad staircase of the Grande Bretagne that day. At Brussels they were sold out bag and baggage by an irate creditor of the Marquis, whose unsavory reputation was now very well established from Paris to Cairo.

In Florence, Mongolfier fought a duel and killed his man, and fled to Spain, leaving his wife penniless and his child sick; nor would he have ever troubled himself further about either of them in the least had not Mathilde been valuable to him as a decoy duck. For all this time whenever he lacked money badly, and could get it from no other source, he would make her write what she afterwards forcibly called "a pack of lies" home, and the work of restoration on the château would be resumed in the usual way, — Mrs. Withers, that is, would send them a check, which Mongolfier would use as he pleased; and he was always pleased to expend it in the shortest possible time as well as the worst possible way.

At Antwerp Mongolfier was imprisoned for several months, and now it was only his wife who stood by him, — his mistresses would none of him, — and it was only by enlisting the sympathy and kind offices of the American consul that Mongolfier was

finally freed by his wife, who hated her husband but loved her child, and was kept in worse bondage than ever by the father's constant threat to take it from her unless his château was as constantly and expensively "restored" as he thought fit; and she in every way did exactly what he commanded.

It was a miserable business throughout, and the petted, indulged American heiress grew to loathe Europe and everything European with a fierce hatred born of a thousand wretched experiences, — insults, degradations, mortifications, deprivations, — such as she could never have imagined until they became a part of her daily life. Nothing but her idolatrous affection for her child and her intense social pride prevented her from taking passage for America twenty times in the course of that two years' purgatorial jaunt from Dan to Beersheba.

One by one her little stock of valuables disappeared — the pretty gifts of her girlhood. The more valuable ones Mongolfier appropriated and sold, of course; what was left or secreted his wife gradually disposed of. When there was nothing left to sell or carry to the pawnbroker, Matilda, Marquise de Mongolfier, sensibly set to work in good American fashion and learned to make artificial flowers beautifully, and with the little sums thus earned she would provide this or that thing for the little creature who had put in her cold heart a ray of warmth divine, and given a soul to a nature anything but noble.

They were at Rouen when the worst came and Matilda struck a blow for freedom. They no longer

lived in expensive hotels. Mongolfier's valet even had been discharged, although he was such an accomplished scamp of the Picaresco variety that his master had parted from him with the greatest reluctance. To cheap lodgings, poor wine, bad cigars, and one franc stakes had this Parisian *élégant*, *flâneur*, *boulevardier* come; and if he had been terrible in prosperity, it may be imagined what sort of companion, husband, and friend he proved in adversity.

His wife bitterly recalled one of her girlish speeches as she looked at him one May morning, as he sat by an open window, dressed in a most disreputable old dressing gown, unshaved, his naked feet thrust into slippers, his fourth glass of absinthe held between his shaking fingers, and this was it: "I would n't marry an *American* for *anything*. Oh, what a fool, *fool*, *fool*, I have been," she thought, and between you and me, my reader, few are the American heiresses who have made what are called "great matches" abroad who have not sooner or later come to the same conclusion, to say nothing of sensible people at home.

She was also thinking that matters had reached a point where something had to be done, and was trying to muster up courage to do it. But one look at Mongolfier drawing down his bushy black brows over his hawk's nose, and wrinkling up his wolfish lips over his favorite tipple shook her resolution, as nothing else could. Body and soul she felt conquered, dominated by this forceful, cruel personality. She sighed deeply, and picking up her child she

went down into the grimy court-yard below, and sat there on a bench while her baby daughter played at bo-peep with Nanon the cook, stretched out her hands towards a dancing sunbeam playing about a battered Faun, or ran here and there with the uncertain totter that yet so rarely comes to harm.

But she was not allowed to stay there long, for presently her miserable meditations were interrupted by a loud "*Ici, Mathilde!*" from above, as Mongolfier's head appeared at the window *au cinquième* for a moment. "Go to Nanon, my precious," she said in English to her baby — she always spoke English to the child, and then she wearily mounted the long flight of steps, guessing that trouble and affliction awaited her at the top. Nor was this cheerful prognostication, based upon an intimate knowledge of Mongolfier's character, methods, and needs, in the least disappointed. He met her at the door, and with a theatrical flourish, a "*Moi qui vous parle*" gesture eminently characteristic, said: —

"Come in. I have of what to speak to you, Madame." Inspired by his grievous wrongs and his absinthe, he then proceeded to go over the whole ground of their relation to each other. His hands, mouth, eyes, tongue, ears — his very scalp moved energetically up and down as, fired by the theme of what he habitually called his "sacrifices," Mongolfier rolled forth a perfect torrent of sarcasms, reproaches, statements, abuse of his father-in-law, contempt for his wife. After thrashing the old, old wheat, with the same ancient *tribulum*, he got up and faced his wife, his hands on his hips, his face

so hideous from rage that she involuntarily shrank away from him as he approached.

"Is it, then, that you refuse to ask that atrocious old miser your father, who is wallowing like the hog in money, for a small sum like this?" he demanded. "Look at him American, nobody, *paysan* enriched by the pure chance — knowing not how to spend the fortune. *Maintenant*, look at me, *Mongolfier*, *Normane habile*, of ancient family, of blood royal in fact — yes! but yes! entrapped by your family into this marriage and left in disgraceful poverty. A million a year would have given but a proper maintenance for a man in my position. It was but my due from him. For him *trop d'honneur*. And what have I got — nothing, *absolument rien!*"

"You have spent three hundred thousand dollars of my father's money. Do you call that nothing?" replied Mathilde with a spark of spirit. "And what have you done with it? What has been my share of it?"

"*Your* share, *impertinente*, that you are, — infamous demand! Have you not a name known throughout Europe — a coronet? And you demand also the *money!* For what did I marry you? For your beauty, you think? For your wit? For your family connection? Oh, yes. Doubtless. Are there not scores of women in Europe who would gladly pay anything to be Madame la Marquise De Mongolfier! When a member of the *bourgeoisie* raises her eyes to the nobility she expects to give something for the privilege and pay the piper for the dance, for the *entrée*, the title, the *pas*. And you Americans

expect to come over here and take a Mongolfier for nothing — for what a *chef*, a groom of Chamber gets! *Tiens*, Mathilde. Either that father of yours gives me that fifty thousand dollars, or I send you back to him — and keep my child. She goes not to America to be contaminated by the American ideas — *ideas* do I say — they have none! — '*notions*' I should say. You, my wife, refuse to do your duty to your husband. You are unworthy to be a wife, a mother. My will should be your supreme law, and you defy me — your husband. You side with that perjured parent of yours who is content to have all the luxury, all the comforts — sixty-five millions! *figurez-vous!* and leaves *me*, Mongolfier, a pauper! It is all your fault. Had you properly represented my sacrifices, my needs, my merits, it had not been so. *Eh bien!* you have taken your part. You persist? I will chase you from my presence, from France. I will take my child from you and give her to the Sisters to rear in the honorable traditions that become a Mongolfier. Never shall you see her again or hear from her never!"

"Oh! Mongolfier, you would not — you could not — you shall not do such a thing! Take my baby from me!" wailed Mathilde, starting up from her seat as if it were a nest of scorpions.

"*Vous verrez, madame. Vous verrez,*" replied he, as he swaggered up and down the room. "The money or — *chat!*" He seized a child's cap from the table near him and flung it into the fire, as he spoke.

"It is not my fault. I have done nothing but

write home for money ever since I was married, until I am perfectly ashamed. And how do you spend it? Do you suppose I don't know? And you leave me in need — and your child in need, while you gamble it all away, or do worse with it! And now you are threatening to take my child from me — my baby. Mongolfier, do you know what you are? You are a rascal! you are a cheat! you are a libertine! you are everything that I hate and despise in a man. You are almost a devil. And you have gone too far. Take my baby from me! I 'd like to see you do it! I 'd like to see anybody do it in France or England or any other country on earth. If you try it, I will *kill* you! Do you hear?" shrieked Mathilde, pale with fury, all her fear of her husband forgotten.

"Tigress! Calm yourself. The money, or my child," repeated the noble marquis, amazed by her pluck. "So it is that you regard your husband? *Bon.* We understand each other. I married you. It was a *bêtise.* I should have made you my mistress. But I wanted your money. And I mean to have it. You understand?"

"You *dare* to say that to me, your wife — the mother of your child!" Mathilde said in almost a whisper. "And you call yourself a man. You pride yourself on being a French nobleman of the old *régime.* These are the honorable Mongolfier traditions, I suppose, that you have been talking of. Oh! how I *scorn* you. Oh! how I thank God that I am an American, and that there never was, and never will be an American like you, while the world

lasts! I shall go back to my father — Go!" Mongolfier could scarcely believe that his worm had really turned at last. He stared at his wife.

"With my permission. *Certes.* So be it. But understand this. *J'ai la puissance paternelle.* The child, I shall keep," he replied, and the wretch absolutely made her a low bow as he left the room, which must have been a most gratifying proof of respect under the circumstances.

"Oh! my baby! My baby!" sobbed the wretched lady, all her courage gone in a moment. She went off into an acute attack of hysterics forthwith, and Nanon, the cook, and Marianne, the housemaid, had great work to bring her round again. But Mongolfier went his way serenely enough. "Do not talk to me of the Americans," he said over his cards that night to an opponent, recently returned from New Orleans, and inclined to be enthusiastic over the United States. "They are everything that is barbarous and atrocious in taste, manners, habits, and I abhor them all. Excuse my heat, monsieur. But you do not know what my sufferings have been — how I have been their victim. My whole career has been blighted by that people — *naturellement!*"

He spoke with impressive sadness and dignity, and the gentleman apologized for introducing a subject so disagreeable. Belisarius, Aristides, Coriolanus, could not have matched Mongolfier in his rôle of injured martyr. All his friends at the various clubs (until he was kicked out of them or asked to resign) had heard of his wrongs and sympathized with him warmly.

"What is an American father-in-law for, if it is not to be one's banker, commissary, *cache-tout*, pay-all! Pouf! Mongolfier has burnt the paws and not got the chestnuts," said the Comte de Mallifiet of his brother. "Of what was he thinking, not to manage better about the settlements? And Mongolfier is no mutton, either! I like not the *mésalliance* with or without the Yankee millions, for my part. He should have married in his own nation and station. *Il est vaurien, c'est vrai; mais il est Mongolfier. A quoi bon?* make such a marriage. She will never be *of us*. He will never be an American. He is above all '*mauvais sujet*,' behold you! But her *dot* ought to have been at least ten millions — settled on the children, *I* should say. Then in the next generation we might have an heir worthy of the old name. This '*fusion de races*,' as Coquelin calls it, though — I like it not at all. For the Frenchman, France and the Frenchwoman always," was the young lieutenant's reply.

A series of quarrels, all more or less violent, ensued between the Marquis and his wife, but Mathilde was not to be moved. She refused to ask for any more money. She began to make her preparations to leave her husband. And she fully meant to abduct her own child in spite of French law, and slip off to England or America with it the very first opportunity afforded by Mongolfier, who often, up to this time, had left her for weeks at a time during the season at Homburg or Monaco. Woman-fashion, she deceitfully patched up a kind of reconciliation, with this purpose in her mind. But Mongolfier was not deceived in the least — not he.

And so it happened that one morning his wife awoke at about five o'clock and chanced to sit up and look over at — an empty crib beside her bed. She bounded into the middle of the room, and ran into her dressing-room. Not only was her child gone, but all its belongings, as well. She understood instantly what had been done. She rushed to her window, and there below, was her baby, dressed for traveling, sitting in Marianne's lap. She heard Mongolfier say, "Where is that carriage? That idiot promised to have it here by five promptly." The wretched creature flew to her bureau, got out a pistol that she had long ago bought for some such emergency, and still in her nightgown rushed down the servants' staircase. She fell once in her haste, picked herself up and ran on down, and choosing her moment she slipped up behind Mongolfier, who was ogling Marianne and lighting a cigarette.

"Give me back my baby or I'll kill you!" said Mathilde, putting the pistol to her husband's right temple, and Mongolfier turned pale over the situation."

"Very well. Since you make a scene I will," he said, affecting to consider himself the subject of a joke. But the pistol once lowered, he jerked it out of her hand; and taking his cane, this *preux chevalier* and ornament of chivalry then and there beat his wife most shamefully, in a blue fury that was frightful to witness. The carriage came and he ordered Marianne into it and bade the coachman drive off. But the man was a good husband and father, and he had heard of the matrimonial infeli-

cities of the pair; he drove only outside the court-yard and came to a halt. The servants poured out of the kitchen offices in the greatest excitement, and there was a general cry of horror, of indignation, when Mathilde broke away from her husband, and, running like a lapwing after the carriage, fell fainting under the very wheels crying, "My baby! My baby!"

"Monster! Do you thus chastise a wife — a mother!" shrieked old Nanon. "Where are the gendarmes?" But Mongolfier coolly pushed his wife's body aside, and jumping into the carriage had himself driven to the station en route to Paris, blank blanking America and all things American from start to finish, while trembling Marianne squeezed herself into the farthest corner, and a wan little child wailed pitifully the whole journey long.

CHAPTER XIV

While the Mongolfiers had been reaping the particular crop which excessive worldliness on one side and wickedness on the other produces in such sorrowful perfection, very different scenes were taking place in the tiny apartment rented by the De Trobriands in Rome. By dint of native shrewdness, and much bargaining in a limited Ollendorf Italian, Mrs. De Trobriand and Thankful Fisher between them managed to fit up a homelike, tasteful spot to which not only John was always glad to return, but which a great many other Americans in Rome found delightful in its restfulness and refinement. Not a great bare foreign salon full of expensive tapestries and "bigotry and virtue." Not a palace, not a museum, not an upholsterer's Paradise nor a florist's conventional bower, but a sweet bit of America set down in a foreign capital, in the strongest and strangest possible contrast to it and everything about it — a *home* with a touch of New England severity about it, spotless in cleanliness, orderly in arrangement, comfortable in the extreme.

On the corner of the centre table was Mrs. De Trobriand's Bible and prayer book ready for evening worship. Near the lamp was her work basket, generally full of John's socks, which she darned with great skill and diligence, no matter who dropped in.

The little room overflowed with books. The brass fender and andirons and glowing open fire made glorious summer of an Italian winter day. A *jardinière* by the window showed what Thankful could do when she turned her attention to flowers. Her prim household mats, and spill-holders, and tea-cosies, and the straw cuffs (her only connection with art) for dishwashing, and duster bags, mops, pails, brooms, and brushes showed what her part in the household was.

A sunny, clean little dining-room, a couple of cheerful, clean bedrooms, a large and clean kitchen, a clean hall and clean stairs — carpeted "to get rid of all that klopperty, klop," as she expressed it, also bore witness to her industry, and would alone have made the house remarkable in a community that emphatically regards dirt from the standpoint of the ancients as "a painless evil." Her picture of Lincoln with the American flag above it, prominently displayed on the dining-room mantelshelf, "to show these foreigners," a careful banishment of everything Italian and hatred of everything Romish, a genius for clam chowder, pies, and baked beans, showed what her politics, prejudices, and gifts were.

A general air of being offended, or ready to take offense on the slightest possible pretext, an air of stiff and mute protest against the prevailing state of affairs, no matter what that state was, a lynx-eyed supervision of the De Trobriand belongings that took in every hole in the rug, rent in the linen, spot on the furniture, or chair out of place, combined with the most aggressive plainness of speech, made

Thankful seem anything but attractive to the general public. But the De Trobriands knew her value, quite understood her devotion to their interests, called her "a character," submitted cheerfully to her characteristic traits, independence, and interference, and lived under a benevolent despotism tempered only by Thankful's conscience and Mrs. De Trobriand's tongue, and certainly benefited greatly by her services.

With a good deal of breezy discussion and honest opposition, the two women lived together in real amity, and united in devoting themselves to John. John's clothes, dinners, habits, work, preferences, needs, governed the little household absolutely, and not Mrs. De Trobriand herself was more bent on "spoiling" him than the sour-faced, prim, sound-hearted Thankful. Mrs. De Trobriand caught her once slipping a half-dozen expensive new shirts into his top drawer, and charged her with buying them out of her own money. The two women very nearly got into something more than "a spat" over the enormity.

All the same, John's handkerchiefs multiplied, and his cravats were various and magnificent, and mother and son waxed more and more fond of their faithful Abigail. John's handsome face, John's invariable courtesy, John's charming manners, had smitten this New England rock in a tender spot, and "do for him" she would. Many a merry meal did the few intimate friends whom John admitted to the house have in that little room, with the loggia all ablaze with geraniums, and the muslin curtains blow-

ing back and forth, the cat on the hearth, Mrs. De Trobriand gentle and smiling at the head of her table, John talking shop, politics, books, everything under heaven, and Thankful in a rustling print and stiff collar serving her incomparable dishes under protest — occasionally giving an opinion and a very good opinion, too, about something under discussion.

Thankful's intense Americanisms, her battles with the tradespeople, her detestation of everything Italian, her attitude toward the Vatican, furnished a great deal of amusement to all the party, and it being John's habit to represent her to every newcomer as an Irish Roman Catholic, devoted to the Pope, and charmed with everything Italian, it is small wonder that she sometimes burst into a denial of what she considered very grave charges with a spirit and biting keenness that as one young Englishman put it "showed how intelligent the lower classes are in America" — a remark overheard by Thankful and resented by her to her dying day.

"I am a lucky fellow, I can tell you, mother! Other students are stuck off in dingy boarding-houses, and living in restaurants, and sleeping in all sorts of holes, and look at me! You and Thankful will ruin me if I don't look out — mollycoddling me as you do. If I did n't have to work so tremendously hard, I know I should n't be worth my salt. If Polly were only here, I should be perfectly happy," John would say. He was full of ambition, full of hope, delighted to find himself in such an atmosphere, and determined to make the most of his opportunities. But he was the best sort of fellow,

and he was very grateful for the entire devotion of two good women. He read to them. He constantly brought them little gifts. He took them for walks and on excursions. If Thankful had a headache, he would tramp off at once to get some remedy for it, no matter how tired he was. If his mother seemed dull or out of sorts, he had always some little plan for going here or there and setting her up again. He was not in the least selfish, and consequently was full of considerate kindness for the two creatures whose one idea was to be minced and served on toast for him if necessary.

John was not the Apollo, the Bayard, the Talleyrand, the Titian, that they thought him, of course, but he deserved and did his best to repay their affection; and not even John's letters, written every Sunday at great length, after the three of them got home from church, gave Polly much more satisfaction than his mother's. For John only occasionally wrote of himself, whereas Mrs. De Trobriand's epistles were all John from beginning to end, with side remarks quoted from Thankful about John again, that put Polly so *en rapport* with the little household that she often felt bodily transported where her heart was living all during this season of labor and probation for her sweetheart. John did not know, of course, much of the sacrifices, the labors, the contrivances, of the two women, who always met him with cheerfulness, real or assumed, and gave him of their best, feeling that "John must not be troubled," "John must find everything just right," John must not be worried with this or know of that.

As the months went on, and all went well, it was a beautiful thing to see the intense joy and triumph of Mrs. De Trobriand over "John's place and position in Rome," for he soon made one for himself. In addition to a high order of talent, he had the far rarer quality which Archbishop Whewell characterizes as "sticktion," "the capacity for taking infinite pains," a great staying power. Lenoir, the famous French artist, in whose studio he first began to work, was struck by his pupil's intense application and resolute determination in the smallest details. From a first silent inspection of John's work, as he stood behind his chair, the great man went on to find fault continually, and John's heart sank under it a good deal. "I do not want to rival Heilbrun's 'Chamber of Horrors'; if I can't paint, I want to know it," he thought, referring to the failures of another artist well known in Rome. But he went on with his work.

Then Lenoir went on to criticise quite mercilessly his studies; and John flinched, for he had the artist fibre and was sensitive, but he worked harder than ever. Then the day came in which Lenoir paused with a short "*Bon*," or "*Excellent*," before John's canvas, and looked at it very thoughtfully with a smile. Finally, one morning when John was dashing on his paint in fine style, unconscious of his master's presence, Lenoir astonished him immensely by seizing his hand, brush and all, and exclaiming, "Ah, *magnifique!* you have it, you have it, the divine gift! You can *paint*, monsieur; your career is assured; I take off my hat to you." He lifted his

velvet skull-cap as he spoke. He burst into enthusiastic praise; he called to the other students, and bade them come and see how John had treated his "Finding of Moses."

He would have no more work done that day, but sent out for champagne, and drank health and success and above all numbers of pictures as good and better to John, with a warmth and pride that revolutionized the studio and the students, used to seeing him self-contained, a trifle sour, and always severe.

"I knew he 'd come out on top; he 's an American. Do you suppose if there 's anything worth doing to be done, that he 'd let any Italian get ahead of him?" was Thankful's comment on the affair, when John related at home what had happened that evening.

"Well, I don't know. There was Raphael, you know, Michael Angelo, and a good many others," said John, between two mouthfuls of milk toast, with a side glance at his mother.

"That was either before America was discovered, or while it belonged to England, then, I 'll be bound," retorted Thankful, "before we got the chance to show what was in us, anyway."

"John, don't you be led away by this. Don't you let your head be turned by your success, when it comes. Do you thank the Giver of the gift whenever people praise you for what you have no more to do with, really, than the color of your eyes. And keep a humble heart and a clean one, John, or you 'll never come to anything in art. The good God does so hate a fool, John. Nevertheless, for

all my lecturing, I am just as glad and proud as I can be this day, my son," said his mother to him, with tears in her eyes, the dinner over, and the two sitting *tête-à-tête* in the firelight, her hand in his. "Oh, how glad Polly will be! In a few months you may be able to go home and claim her."

This opened the floodgates for John, and for half the evening they talked of Polly and home and the marriage that was to be, and of John's future as an artist for the rest of it. At eleven o'clock young Methlin, John's English friend, dropped in, bringing Herr Obermann, a German fellow student. And John conducted himself with modesty on the occasion, so it is to be supposed that his mother's advice had borne fruit. Mrs. De Trobriand's hospitable soul would not allow them to go away without some cheer. Looking almost like a girl again, so bright of eye and light of step was she, forthwith she made for the party a Welsh rarebit, and got out some beer, and stayed up until quite late talking with the young men, and making such an atmosphere of home in the little room that not one of the three would hear of her leaving them. "I had better take myself off," she said, as John drew up her chair. But she was pleased to stay, and they protested warmly that she could not be spared.

What they said to John and of John, and John's way of taking it, so rejoiced her motherly heart that it was not until Thankful's busy little clock struck twelve that she rose with a cry of surprise. "Is it so late? John, give me the Bible," she said; and

presently young Methlin was reading his five verses in his sonorous, manly fashion, and went down on his marrow bones, like the honest English gentleman that he was, with John and his mother, while Herr Obermann, blushing and embarrassed, a rank agnostic, leaned a pensive elbow on the table, as his tribute to what he always called the "Allgütigste." "My son has had a signal blessing to-day, and we could not go to bed without giving thanks," said Mrs. De Trobriand, with her sweetest smile. "Good-night now, and come in whenever you can."

"There is nothing like the mother," remarked Herr Obermann sagely, with a backward fling of his blonde mane when she had closed her bedroom door; and the trio had a few more words and then separated. But John was still awake when the sun came up next morning, and its first golden beam fell upon a perfect book of a letter, addressed to "Miss Mary Withers, Bar Harbor, Maine, United States of America." His restless young blood had driven him out for a long walk after his friends left, and then it had seemed impossible to defer telling the lady of his heart "all about it," and that soon, very soon, there would begin for them both paradise perpetual.

Four months from that day John had sold two pictures, and become distinctly visible to all the world. An English duke, a connoisseur, had bought the "Finding of Moses," and Munich had added his "Cleopatra" to the famous collection of the art-loving old town. Lenoir seemed more pleased than if he himself had been decorated.

"I say, old chap, you must be no end of a swell

at it," said young Methlin. "You 'll be puffed to death by the papers now, and mobbed by the women, and taken up by the swells and all that, and you won't care for *my* society any longer. I am such a confounded idiot, you see, I shall never do anything at it. I had far better go home and set up as a greengrocer. All the same, we have had a jolly two years of it here together, have n't we?"

"That we have. And I 'll let you know when I am tired of you," said John. "You must come to America and make us a visit when Polly and I are married."

Methlin knew all about Polly, of course, and so did Obermann, and though they were far too generous to grudge John either his sweetheart or his success, they were both very blue when John began to strip his studio and announced his intention to leave for America that week.

"It 's confoundedly hard luck being a dunce," remarked Methlin to Obermann, as they watched John lay "Josephine" (limpest of lay figures) in his big box. "See how I 've pegged away at painting. I 've not sold any pictures; I 've not got a pretty sweetheart waiting for me at home. I dare say I don't deserve it. But the luck of that beggar!"

It was Obermann who carried Thankful's birdcage and bonnet-box and shawl and umbrella to the station, when the De Trobriands finally left Rome, like the kind soul, the German angel that he was; and all the thanks that he got for it was a "That 'll do. Europe won't see *me* again in a hurry, I can tell you!" from that uncompromising American.

"Bort we shall you behold, matame, nicht war?" cried Obermann, as Mrs. De Trobriand mounted the steps of the coach.

"Oh, yes! And Thankful will come back, too. You won't believe it, but she forgot to kiss the Pope's toe!"

"Get out, man! don't do that! I can't stand it!" said John, hastily repressing Herr Obermann's effort to give him a kiss.

"Bort ven I feels like dis I *morst*, I dell you!" replied Herr Obermann, making a dash at John's left cheek, which was as red just then as an Irish beauty's. A kiss John got in spite of himself, and then he fell back into a seat by his mother, and rolled out of Rome a happy and successful man.

CHAPTER XV

En route to Paris, what was the amazement of John De Trobriand to see Madame la Marquise de Mongolfier enter his carriage at Rouen, sans husband, sans maid, sans flunkey, sans everything in the way of appurtenances that he would have expected; very pale, very shabby, with a fierce air about her that spoke of griefs and wrongs long endured and now resented. He had never liked Mathilde, who, for her part, had been intolerably rude to him in the old days by being excruciatingly civil. She had been convinced of his attachment to Polly from the first, and at that period having no desire for any such brother-in-law, but the most lofty ambitions of every kind, she had refused to recognize him as being on the same social plane with herself, and had treated him persistently *de haut en bas*, as a person admitted for a brief period to the superlative honor of being "received" by the ladies of the Withers family, and then on sufferance merely. This absurd piece of pretension had naturally not endeared her to John at the time. But she was Polly's sister, and he had not seen Polly for two years, and his heart was so full of her that he could have welcomed even Mrs. Withers herself at that moment, though the prospect of having that lady for his mother-in-law was the one shadow in the

bright pictures he was always painting mentally of his future with Polly.

On the other hand, we know how much the Marquise had had to subdue and chasten her spirit since they had parted. John, too, had risen in the world, as she was well aware, and could no longer be patronized. Best of all, he was an *American*. And not Thankful Fisher herself, sitting very erect on the back seat and openly sniffing at France and everything French, just as she had done at Italy and everything Italian, was now more crassly prejudiced against everything foreign than was the lady who had formerly considered that nothing good could come out of America.

So, when John lifted his hat and darted to the help of the Marquise, exclaiming, "*You* here, Miss Withers! — I beg your pardon — Marquise," as he seized her bag, he was met with an effusive cordiality that astonished him not a little. "Oh, how glad I am to see you!" said Mathilde, shaking hands earnestly with Mrs. De Trobriand. She was glad, too. The very sight of that calm, matronly face, so sweet and so strong, acted like a tonic on her wearied mind, and "took her home" at a bound. "Oh, how good it is, how delightful, to be with Americans again!" she said, as her eyes wandered to Thankful's prim figure. And she felt it to be so, indeed. "You may well say so," replied Thankful, with one of her dogmatic nods, and little suspected that no nail was ever hit more exactly on the head.

When she was settled among them, she naturally began to be communicative; and so enraged, so out-

raged was she by Mongolfier's atrocious conduct, so warmed by this sudden restoration to old associations when she was a prey to the greatest loneliness and sadness, that she made no mystery of the fact that her marriage with Mongolfier had been a wretched mistake; that he had treated her abominably; and that she was going to Paris to try and recover her child. Under Mrs. De Trobriand's kind and sympathetic inquiries and replies the whole wretched story came out, and presently Mathilde was leaning against her new friend's shoulder and sobbing out her grief over her child's abduction, while Mrs. De Trobriand did her best to comfort her, saying: "It is very dreadful, my dear, — dreadful! If anybody had taken John away from me! — why, I don't know what I would n't have done! But you will get her back again. There, there, dear. Don't cry any more. You will find her. We will all help you to find her, won't we, John?"

As for John, his eyes were sparkling so with indignation that they looked like the fine diamonds they were, and with a flushed face he bent forward and tenderly took the Marquise's hand. Pressing it warmly, he said: "Never mind, Mathilde. Don't you worry. I 'll find that child, if she is in France, no matter where she is, and give her back to you. No; don't thank me. I have n't done it yet, but I will! You know I am engaged, conditionally, to Polly, and going home now to see her. You must just consider me a brother from this time out. Do you hear?" He had never called her Mathilde in his life before, of course, and she did not know at

all that he was engaged to Polly, and marveled that her mother had allowed it.

But it was such a luxury to hear English, such a comfort to meet any American under the circumstances, and such a pleasure to meet this particular American, who made her feel at once as if she were back under her father's wing again, protected, cared for with the sort of reverence, and indulged with the kind of uncritical generosity, that always seems a matter of course to American women until they have had some experience of other lands and men, that to John's amazement she suddenly bent toward him and gave him a kiss.

He got very red in the face over this, but he was pleased, and the pair were soon having a frank, heart to heart talk that did them both a great deal of good, while Mrs. De Trobriand and Thankful eagerly made their comments and suggestions when the question of recovering the child came up.

"I telegraphed to father after Mongolfier left me, and he sent me a check for ten thousand, so I have plenty of money. You should have seen old Nanon's eyes when I showed it to her. You see I had had a touch of brain fever, and when I came to myself I found that I was in her room. The good creature had taken me in and nursed me faithfully like an angel. One or two respectable French people had called and asked after me, but in all that town Nanon was my only *friend*. Think of it! She has bought an annuity and given up work on what I gave her, dear old thing!" Mathilde explained.

"Without money nothing can be done in Paris;

with it, a great deal," said John, and the four forthwith resolved themselves into a committee of ways and means. It was settled that they should not stop at the same hotel; that they should make their inquiries independently; that they should meet and report daily; and that they should leave no stone unturned to accomplish their object. Mathilde accordingly put up at the Hôtel Vouillemont, on reaching Paris, and John took his mother to an apartment on the Boulevard Hausmann.

John so panted for the fray that he started off without his dinner to begin his search; and it is certain that the poor mother got none, for she had no sooner engaged her rooms, and deposited her luggage, than she called for a brougham and drove to the convent in which she had been educated; to see the duchess, her sister-in-law; to the church to which her former confessor was attached; to her old home, that she might speak to the concierge. But she got from the duchess, strange to say, no comfort, and small sympathy. That lady deplored the scandal she was creating by leaving Mongolfier, and pretended to be in total ignorance about the "*petite nièce, si gentille, si jolie!*" She said that her brother had probably taken the child to some peasant in the country. The Sisters, of course, knew nothing, but advised her strongly to return to her husband. Her confessor was not in Paris. The concierge was full of inquiries about her mother and sister and Monsieur le Marquis, but that was all.

John, meanwhile, went to various clubs in Paris and asked if Mongolfier was in town. But as that

gentleman had been metaphorically kicked out of all these institutions, nothing was to be heard of him there. John then went to see a French lawyer, a clever young *avocat* of his acquaintance, and "posted himself" about the law in such cases, — not a very cheering visit, for French law has a great deal to say about *la puissance paternelle*, and takes small account of mothers when it comes to claiming a child. And from there he went to see a famous detective, whose address he had obtained from the lawyer, — M. Barbol, ex-*sergent de ville*, and the repository of half the crimes and scandals of Paris; then feeling that everything was done that he could do, he got a dinner for one franc that no capital in Europe could match for ten, at a dingy little restaurant close by, and went back to his lodgings a tired man.

For a month the pair exhausted themselves and every possibility of achieving their purpose; children were to be found by the hundred, but not *the* child, and Mathilde was declaring that she should go to the American Minister and telegraph for her father, when chance did for them what not even a mother's love, a friend's devotion, and Monsieur Barbol's experience had been able to accomplish.

Walking disconsolately past the Madeleine, which was near her hotel, one morning, Mathilde came suddenly upon Ninette Armand, formerly a maid of hers. Ninette stopped her and spoke to her with all the vivacity of her race and character. She was charmed to see Madame la Marquise again. She had been desolated not to be present at her marriage, of which she had heard from the other

servants. She was no longer a maid, but had a good place as nurse to a little angel, torn away from a wicked mother and brought to Paris.

"What kind of a child,—a girl?" asked Mathilde eagerly. Ninette assented.

"And where are you living? I will come and see you," asked the eager mother far too eagerly, for Ninette suddenly became reserved.

It was not in a nice quarter of Paris. Madame was doing her too much honor. She was with her sister, whose husband was a "*parfumeur, homme de talent*," but with nerves — but nerves! She took herself off and left the Marquise, who went inside the Madeleine and sat down, wearily wondering whether it was worth while to follow a clue so indefinite. She came to the conclusion that it was not. But three days later, whom should she see but Ninette in a carriage that drove swiftly by; and she recognized the liveries as those of her sister-in-law. She rushed off to a quiet little library in the Rue de la Paix (where she and John daily met and compared notes), half distracted, convinced that her little daughter was in that carriage, — as near her as that!

Meanwhile John had had his little adventures. He was very fond of billiards, and going into one of the larger *cafés* boasting a nice pool-room, he had stumbled upon Mongolfier himself. Here was a situation! John's impulse, of course, was to take him by the throat and choke the truth out of him. But he controlled himself and accosted him civilly instead. Mongolfier was polite but reserved, very.

He told John that his wife was amusing herself in Rouen just then. He pumped him about Mr. Withers's fortune. He abused his father-in-law like a pickpocket.

"And have you not a daughter?" asked John, with what he mistook for finesse. "I am just from Rome, but did I not hear — yes, I did, that you had a daughter?"

"Ah, *oui!* — with her mother," said Mongolfier, lying magnificently. He challenged John to play, and that ingenuous youth, hoping to learn something more from him, pocketed his disgust, and took off his coat. He found out nothing about Mongolfier's child during the progress of that game, but he got some independent sidelights of his own on the gentleman's character, or rather want of one! For before they had been playing long, the Marquis began to bet, and John, to humor him, took it up, and both began to play.

In ten minutes it was borne in upon the second party to the transaction, who was no fool, that Mongolfier was cheating royally in his scoring. John again controlled himself and made sure he was right, while some of the bystanders chuckled secretly to see a well-known Marquis plucking his pigeon so deftly and beautifully. But presently John's turn came, and pouncing like a young tiger on Mongolfier, he forced him back on the billiard-table until it is a wonder that his back was not broken, crying, "You're cheating, you hound!" after which he created a pretty sensation by giving the noble Marquis first a good choke then a better drubbing (using

his cue for the purpose), and then (best of all), applying the tip of his boot judiciously in the right quarter, he neatly finished a remarkably satisfactory job by kicking Mongolfier downstairs, after which he ran out, and hailing a fiacre, was off before anybody could interfere.

"I never once mentioned Mathilde's name in it, for all I was in such a fury," he remarked to himself, as he mopped the perspiration from a very red face. "I wonder if I shall be summoned. Well, it was worth a thousand dollars, and I am willing to pay for the luxury." The pupils of his eyes were still considerably dilated, and his hand was still shaking, when he got to the Rue de la Paix, where Mathilde was waiting for him, and her news did not tend to quiet him. And presently Barbol came in to say that his man had seen a child in the carriage of Madame la Duchesse de Sauveterre that morning, — a child of the description given him.

So together the three went to work and planned and talked for two hours. In twelve hours Barbol had found Ninette's abode. In twelve more Mathilde, masquerading as Madame Marot, had taken a room with a bow-window overlooking the perfumer's garden, and had seen her child walking there with Ninette (looking well and happy), and had looked and longed and wept, and even exposed herself to view, contrary to Barbol's sternest commands and most earnest entreaties. A pretty bit of comedy followed. The child identified, Barbol promptly subsidized Ninette, and soon the mother had the unspeakable happiness of clasping her little one in

her arms again, talking to her, staring at her, asking her about a thousand questions, all in a breath, and crying over her to her heart's content.

Madame Marot now gave up her apartment as suddenly as she had taken it. The following day Madame la Marquise de Mongolfier relinquished her suite of rooms at the Hôtel Vouillemont, Rue Boissy d'Anglas, to the great grief of the proprietor, who was making a small fortune out of her. And the same day the De Trobriands, *mère et fils*, accompanied by Thankful Fisher, quietly left the Anglo-French *Pension* in which they had been vegetating impatiently for a month, and took the train for Calais, taking with them a certain little girl, and bound for America via Dover and London and Liverpool. Madame la Marquise drove publicly in a handsome open carriage to another station, having with her Ninette and Ninette's child, and the party left for Bordeaux.

But Mongolfier had not been asleep all this time. He had his spies, his Barbol, his little plans and preparations. When his wife got to Bordeaux, she was arrested. The French law had been invoked, and madame traced that far. Mongolfier ran down from Paris and personally conducted the affair. But when the *juge de la paix* heard all the circumstances, when he knew from Mathilde what sort of husband and father Mongolfier had been, and what he had done, he became singularly obtuse in doing his obvious duty. Madame had a right to leave France. Madame disavowed having abducted her own child. She had traveled to Bordeaux in

company with an old servant and that servant's child.

Madame was released and left for England, where she promptly joined her friends, and recovered her baby daughter, to the immense joy and satisfaction of the whole party. A happier party never set foot on a Cunarder, dropped down the Mersey, and steamed away to New York, "leaving that old Europe to all its ways and wickedness, and going back to the best country in the world," as Thankful patriotically put it. There was nothing for Mongolfier to do but to rave, to pose, to vilify America and all things American, to return to Paris, to inaugurate fresh legal measures; — outgeneraled by a weak woman, the wife he had so long despised and oppressed.

CHAPTER XVI

When the Witherses came home, they stopped for some months at a hotel in New York. Mrs. Withers was too wise to risk a second social defeat in Gotham, and she had fully made up her mind to live in Washington. With her usual worldly acumen, she had fixed upon that city as the one best suited to her purpose, — a fixed purpose, from which she had never swerved for one moment while abroad, namely, that of being a person of the highest fashion and consequence at home. But Mr. Withers had business in New York. For one thing, he had to get his affairs into a state that would admit of his retiring from active business. For another, he had to place Wallace in what he called "harness." His wife persuaded him to take the first step, in order that she might carry out her own plans.

"But what shall I do, Lizzie? Great Scott, woman, it is all very well for *you!* But what on earth am I to do with myself?" he urged. Even in prospect, a life without "business" seemed to him only a living death. He was in no haste, therefore, to carry out any such scheme. Indeed, the thought of it struck a kind of panic to his soul, and he plunged into Wall Street with more than his usual energy, that he might shake off the dread *après?* which already haunted him. He was hurry-

ing down town one morning when the news reached him that his partner, Jacob Strong, was dead.

"I have n't got time to go to funerals," he said to his wife. "Send some flowers, or something, Lizzie."

"Oh, popper! You 've got to die yourself some time. Do go to it, or go and see Mrs. Strong, at least," urged Polly, who as a privileged person was very much in the habit of speaking her mind to her father.

Mr. Withers felt as if he had been hit in the middle of his forehead. He frowned angrily, and bade Polly hold her tongue. But the shot told. All that day, all the remainder of his life, he spent reckoning with this painful thought, wrestling with it, smitten by it; and so great was the suffering involved that in a little time even his wife noticed that he was "changed," and even on "'Change" men soon began to ask each other, "What is the matter with Withers?"

In the cold gray light of eternity, how different were the hues, how altered the dimensions, of what men called his prosperity! Of money, money, money had he thought, for money, money, money had he labored. But shrouds have no pockets. He could carry nothing away with him, — trite truth, and terrible as trite, long hidden from him by the mists of earth. Of loving and giving, the two great joys of heaven, he had known almost nothing, and he was continually asking himself the old, old question which every soul of man given up entirely to temporal things inevitably is confronted by,—*A quoi*

bon? He looked quite haggard that night after his unusually busy day; and as he was changing his coat, he remarked to Polly, who had received him with an unreproachful kiss: —

"I 've given those Sisters out in California that took me in when I was a child a hundred thousand for an orphanage, to-day. But don't tell your mother. Hear?" It was literally his first experience in almsgiving, and he felt thoroughly shamefaced as he announced it, and already half repented of the "piece of sentimentality."

"Have you? I 'm so glad! That 's right, popper. What would have become of you but for them! And you 'll never miss it. Besides, if you did, that 's nothing," commented Polly.

"Hem!" said Mr. Withers; "that 's just like a woman." He cut down the amount by one half next morning, but felt so wretched in the afternoon that he sent off the original draft by post, and had a new, pleasant feeling about the heart that surprised him.

Wallace was put by his father in a large banking business, and carefully initiated into its mysteries by everybody concerned. It was a bank in which Mr. Withers had large deposits, and there had been no trouble about getting the place.

"Treat him as if I had n't a cent. Break him in, Rogers. Keep his nose to the grindstone and take Europe out of him," was his father's request to the president. "I 've been fool enough to let him be educated out of his own country, and now he has got to buckle down and learn business. If he makes

any mistakes, charge them to me. But keep him, and work him just as you do the others."

Accordingly, Mr. Wallace Withers became as Jones or Brown to his employers, and had to work early and late, to stand hat in hand before his superiors, to take his share of reproofs and snubs, — worst of all, to get in exchange "only enough to buy his shoes and cigars," as he put it. And of course he did not enjoy this in exchange for Paris and Heidelberg, habitual idleness, and excessive extravagance. He posed before his mother as a perfect martyr to his father's miserliness. His allowance had been cut off. He had no pleasures. He might as well be a counter-jumper in a country store. Was it for this that he had been educated like a gentleman? Was it to be expected that he should throw himself away as a common clerk? Was he to drudge out his life and injure his health "in trade," with a father worth millions? He grew eloquent over his wrongs and threatened all sorts of things. But his mother counseled patience for the present.

"I will get you out of it later. But for the present, keep on the good side of your father until I can manage it," she said. "You *must*, Wallace."

She was surprised to find her husband apathetic when she proposed going to Washington. "It don't matter much; go where you choose," he said, gloomily acceding to her rose-colored statements about the place.

To Washington, therefore, Mrs. Withers went, with all her pictures and tapestries, her *bijouterie* and *vertu*, her porcelains and her jewels, her laces

and her fine furniture, her silver and her gold, her carriages and horses, her French *chef* and English flunkeys, her airs and graces — and her lovely daughter. She took the handsomest house in the place, of course. She opened that house at once to all the senators, judges, generals, admirals, diplomats, and distinguished everybodies and ex-everybodies with whom the place is always filled. She entertained profusely, magnificently, continually. She gave costume balls, and white dinners, and yellow luncheons, and green teas. She had all the Cabinet and the President at her receptions. She had her house full of secretaries and military atta*shes*, as they may well be called, — the young *élégants* from the various legations, who are always found pinned to the side of this or that charming American woman, while they carefully avoid, severely criticise, and heartily dislike her male belongings. Mrs. Withers was "dug up" by the malicious, assailed by the envious, imitated by the admiring, barnacled by the parasitical, observed by the curious, sought by the selfish, gushed over by the insincere, used by the ambitious. She had arrived!

A number of quiet gentlefolk who have always lived in Washington, and have seen the rise and fall of a great many administrations and Roman Republics, — sensible, refined people who are not "temporaries" like Miss Susan Nipper, and like St. Patrick "come of decent people" and live on small incomes in quiet places "out of the swim," as it is elegantly called, — were almost the only persons in Washington unaffected by the advent of the Wash-

ington-Witherses to the Capital. All society, and the florists, dressmakers, hackmen, grocers, butchers, confectioners, and many others were immediately and powerfully affected from a variety of strong personal reasons. The White House was not more popular, more persistently besieged, than Mrs. Withers's doors.

In two seasons she took and held the town by storm. Her "lovely daughter, Miss Withers," "her daughter who married the Marquis de Mongolfier," her *fêtes* abroad, her dinners and balls at home, her striking beauty, her establishment, her husband's fortune, her "selectness," — for she drew the line at dozens of people vastly her superiors, — her humble origin, gave the world enough to talk about, and it availed itself so fully of the opportunity that the inmates of all the boarding-houses, the very almshouse, discussed the previous week's entertainment at Mrs. Withers's with a comfortable sense of being in society pathetic to witness, yet ludicrous in the extreme.

Early in her first season, Mrs. Withers caught her prince, — a Russian prince, it is true, and there are sixty thousand in Russia, at least, but still a prince. Mr. Withers's ducats and Polly's dark eyes were jointly responsible for the fact. And Mrs. Withers's cup was now full. She had now only to marry off her second daughter, as she had done her first, and her work in life would be done, — only fruition, enjoyment, would remain.

"I have never seen mamma so happy," said innocent Polly. She was right. Mrs. Withers sweet-

ened and mellowed as well as swelled with satisfaction when she stepped into her landau, and called to her coachman, "To the British Legation," or "To the White House."

"Ask the poor man, if he wants to come!" she said of a gentleman whose grandfather signed the Declaration of Independence, when her list was being made out for some function. "Let them all come, — they can fill up the corners," she said of the army and navy and bureaucracy of the city. "The *best* people are not coming to-morrow, you know."

It is true that when Miss Moncure came to give her Spanish lesson, — Miss Moncure, who was very blue as to blood and reduced from affluence to the position of a daily governess, — Mrs. Withers had a kitchen chair brought in for her teacher to sit on, while she gave her lesson in the big yellow satin drawing-room. But then, it does take so much to make a lady! And Mrs. Withers was such a fine imitation. Nobody cared for Miss Moncure, who went her way, and told her tale, while everybody crowded to Mrs. Withers's parties, large and small, whenever they got a chance, and praised loudly in many keys her daughter, her entertainments, her grace and accomplishments, all her gifts and possessions, — until they left the house, when they were apt to bring out the high lights in the picture at their leisure by spiteful touches of lampblack criticism and India ink comment, it must be confessed. If the truth must be told, the old Irish widow who darned Polly's stockings every week and mended generally for the family — gossiping mildly with

the great lady, as she did so — was about the only *friend* the family possessed, unless Polly's girl acquaintances be taken into account, with whom she was certainly a great favorite.

Poor Polly's peace of mind was gone, and her life a burden, from the day the Prince appeared on the scene. She could not be rude in her own house, and he was deaf and blind to hints, to snubs, to coldness and reserve. Then she was fairly pushed into his arms by her mother. And a mother can be about the most unpleasant creature in the world to a girl under such circumstances. Polly's engagement was not announced, and John was thousands of miles away. Moreover, John was jealous, her mother determined, her father full of such speeches as, "I don't guess that fellow 'll ever come to anything with his *pictures*." It was very depressing. Still, Polly was loyal and brave and true, and not at all the girl to be dragooned into anything. Mrs. Withers praised her to the Prince until she fairly ran out of the room; entertained the Prince until Polly yawned in his face and read the paper; preached the Prince until her husband snorted audibly at the mere mention of his name, and Polly utterly revolted and declared that she "hated the Russians." She talked of great marriages, "Miss Hobart, of California, to the Duke of Marequipa y Senafiel," or "Miss Sims, of Chicago, to the Prince Boubanoffski, Equerry to the Czar," until Polly fell asleep on the sofa, after having once flamed out with, "It is no use, mamma. I shall *never* marry a foreigner, — *never!*"

Polly was untouched, unmoved, obstinately faithful to her distant John. She amused herself by little talks, walks, dances, flirtations, even, with young Hernandez of the Costa Rican Legation, young Barnwell of the English Legation, young Bienville of the French Legation, and a score of Americans, all of whom fluttered about her bright eyes and brighter prospects like so many matrimonial moths, manfully bearing the pain of being singed for the pleasure of being near Polly. But the lady of their love would leave them any moment to write to John, and an observant postman soon discovered that a certain thick letter with outlandish franks and stamps on it was eagerly looked for and joyfully hailed by the lovely heiress. He was the only person in Washington, indeed, who had any suspicion of the truth. All Polly's suitors hoped for the best, and the Prince was quite convinced that there was something irresistible about him. Everybody else took it for granted that his evident devotion would be duly rewarded. When they went to dinners, Polly was sure to find herself paired with the Prince, pout she never so prettily, and she was always left *tête-à-tête* with him, with or without a pretext, by maids and matrons alike. Lived there an American girl with soul so dead, who never to herself had said, "I will marry a Prince if I get the chance, — trust me for *that*," was society's belief and attitude in the matter — naturally. Well, the foreign letters suddenly stopped coming. And Polly had three proposals that week, she looked so brilliantly good humored and happy. "At last I have made an impression,"

thought Hernandez, Barnwell & Co., also quite naturally.

The Withers's pompous butler received a shock, however, not long after. For late one evening the bell rang, and in walked first *John* (at whom Polly flew with outstretched arms, and was hastily caught and heartily kissed, you may be sure), followed by the dejected figure of the Marquise de Mongolfier, and an exaggerated French *bonne*, all cap, holding by the hand a forlorn little child. It was well that somebody got a welcome, for Mathilde was received by her mother with a cold, "Is that you? What has brought you back *here?*" The two ladies passed into a small boudoir and had a long talk. It was a long scolding for poor Mathilde. Why had she left Mongolfier? All men had their tempers and moods, and she ought to have put up with titled eccentricities; even a beating did n't matter unless it "got out." Did she expect to take her old place in her father's house? She had far better make it up with her husband, after a short visit. Mrs. Withers was anything but pleased to have a *divorcée* on her hands, and her daughter's "grand match" the talk of society. She knew how heads would wag, and tongues be unsheathed, and newspapers revel in all the details of the affair.

"I shall speak to my father. I will see whether he is willing for me to live with such a wretch. You are not at all glad to see me, mamma. And I am tired out. And you have n't even asked me to take off my bonnet!" whimpered the Marquise. Thus assailed, Mrs. Withers had to yield, and make

a merit of it, for she very well knew what her husband would think.

After dinner, though, Polly was sympathetic enough for a dozen women. John had told her all about it before he left, and she and Mathilde let down their back hair, and got into dressing-gowns, and expressed their opinions of Europe in general and Mongolfier in particular with great freedom. Not since they had been schoolgirls had they been so much *en rapport.* Mathilde was loud in her praises of John, which astonished and delighted Polly, and Polly relieved Mathilde's mind by promising to "make popper do everything nice" for Mathilde.

Mr. Withers was absent in New York at the time, and looked gloomy enough on his return. He had been having bad accounts of Wallace from his employers, tales of his irregularities, dissipations, defects, anything but gratifying to his father, who had a great wish to see him a shining commercial light, and his successor. He welcomed his daughter with more kindness than she had at all expected. "You can live here and have what you want, my girl. I always knew that Mongolfier was n't worth the powder and shot it would take to kill him, but you and your mother would have him," he said.

All the same, he did not feel drawn to his daughter any more than before, nor did he take kindly to his much beribboned and laced little grandchild, who spoke only French, scowling darkly at her *bonne* when he came upon the pair, and asking only a few gruff questions about the way the child was to be

brought up. He wanted his daughter to take again her maiden name, and "teach that child English and bring her up sensibly."

But Mrs. Withers loudly opposed the loss of the title, and Mathilde felt that she would prefer to keep it, so Mr. Withers's suggestion was quite overruled. A burning curiosity filled the bosoms of the English flunkeys when Bright the butler reported Polly's reception of John. Mr. Withers was obliged to say, "Get away, there, you fellows!" when he received John in the library next morning, so eager were they to assist at the interview.

"I have come for Polly, sir," said John, when they were alone. "You promised her to me, you know, when I should have made some reputation and could afford to support her. And here I am. I want only Polly, — not a cent of yours, sir. If you want to give her anything, let it be at your death. I prefer to support my wife myself. Of course I can't give her all this," looking around him, "but we shall have enough."

"Humph!" said Mr. Withers, and proceeded to question him closely, finally winding up with, "Well, you can have her. I always thought you had grit, and you have got on. I'll keep my word. Be good to my girl, John. She is one in a thousand. You will, won't you? But don't count on my money. You 'll not see a red cent of it as long as I live. I'm glad you kicked that Mongolfier ape. I'd like to break every bone in his skin."

When John had earnestly thanked him, and gone off in search of Polly, Mr. Withers betook him-

self to bed. He stopped in the hall and bitterly regarded a huge Chinese monster in bronze that blocked his way. "I 'd like to clear all this out; send every bit of it to auction, and sell this house, and send this pack of people flying! What do I want with any of it! I have just given Polly away to that whippersnapper that I 've never seen a dozen times in my life, — all I had, all I had," he mused.

He slowly mounted the palm-fringed staircase, grasping at the railing with a trembling hand. "Polly gone; and my son no good; and Matilda worse than deserted; and Lizzie caring no more for me than for the postman. Except to pay her bills, she has got no use for me at all. What good does all my money do me?" We make fortunes for this: we bring children into the world, and they either disappoint us, or we have to give them to the first person that comes along. He almost groaned aloud as he entered his room, — a room richly upholstered, full of gilding and carving and brocade and satin and lace, a chill, splendid creation of a fashionable upholsterer. Only a book, a fire, a friend, could have made it seem cheerful to the happiest man. Without these, without wife, daughter, son, without God, it felt like a tomb to the lonely old man. He sank into a chair and looked around him. "Lizzie has got all she wants," he thought.

He would have changed his mind if he could have seen a stooping, bowed figure with a white face staring, as he had done, at the Chinese idol in the hall below, and thinking, as he had done, "What is all this to me now?" as she followed him up the stairs.

It was Mrs. Withers. She had not been well for some time, and she had just parted from a fashionable physician whose reputation for bluntness had been sustained by the cold-blooded way in which he had said to her, "Madam, nothing can be done for you. You have cancer."

The choristers at St. Jude's, close by, were singing, "Preserve me, O God, for in Thee have I put my trust. O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my God; my goods are nothing unto Thee. I have set God alway before me; for He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall. Wherefore my heart was glad, and my glory rejoiced: my flesh also shall rest in hope. In Thy presence is the fullness of joy, and at Thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore. Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee: in whose heart are Thy ways. Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well, and the pools are filled with water. The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." But there was no response in the dumb souls of the two idolaters who heard them.

CHAPTER XVII

Even Washington, used to handsome entertainments of every kind, and accustomed to those given by Mrs. Withers (whose reputation for originality and elegance was established as well for her smallest as most costly functions), opened its eyes over the three balls that she now gave in rapid succession. "Columns of ice in her ball-room," "decorated profusely with spring flowers grown in Bermuda," "three bands, and the supper from New York;" "five hundred thousand in diamonds, and her dress old rose brocade trimmed with point d'Alençon;" "her daughter, the Marquise de Mongolfier, was there — poor thing — deserted by her husband — they say he beat her," — these were the comments upon them, and many more such, for Vanity Fair was all agog.

Mr. Withers made no objection to the expense incurred, as had formerly been his habit. He was constantly running over to New York, partly that he might "keep an eye" on Wallace, but chiefly that he might speculate a little, and so in some measure relieve the intense depression from which he was suffering. Husband and wife, alike, after the first great shock of the lifted curtain, plunged only the more recklessly into the void it had revealed, where somehow life had to be met, faced, and lived.

But those were happy days for Polly and John. Their merry voices and happy laughter, as they tripped through the big hall, or romped over the house like a couple of children, quite scandalized Bright, who liked a house to be a kind of British mausoleum, with himself in charge to repress all levity, and subdue all sound, and regulate every movement. Then their drives over the city they never forgot; for apart from youth and love, Washington, when the Forsythia is a tangle of yellow bloom, and the trees are in full leaf, and the skies as blue as Italy's, is a place to charm the oldest and saddest child of earth into some brief, wan sense of what the word "joy" means. It is so brilliantly joyous, beautiful, cheerful. Riding out to the Soldiers' Home, wheeling down the broad avenues, talking eagerly of that rosy, shining path stretching so temptingly before them, John and Polly were so happy that it was ten thousand pities that they could not have been chloroformed just as they were for a thousand years, at least, or crystallized immortal, sin and sorrow proof forever.

They found out and settled a great many things as they went. First, that they had not been mistaken in Paris; that they truly, dearly loved each other and "suited to a dot," as Polly put it. Secondly, that Polly was no worldling, and had never cared for her life at home; that she "pined for her own little home, and wanted to make little dishes, and wear a gingham apron, and stay at home in the evening to read to John," — in short, was domestic in her tastes. She had learned from their *chef* how

to make Nesselrode pudding, and could bone a turkey and stuff it with truffles, and make fruit cake, she told John, and he had to point out that young couples with moderate means do not habitually live on the like.

They had a good laugh over their future economies, over Polly as a housekeeper, over John as a householder, — it was the laughing part of their life, and they made the most of it. John was fortunate enough to get some good orders for pictures from people who considered it an amiable eccentricity for him to paint at all, with such a father-in-law in prospect. The great firm of Mundus & Co. took to John (quite kindly) plus talent and minus any necessity for using it, and was pleased to patronize him quite extensively, having heard from Polly of his Roman laurels and prodigious genius.

Both the young people were of the same mind about their wedding. It could not come too soon. It should be done as quietly as quickly. John not being a Marquis simplified matters, too, astonishingly. Mrs. Withers thought no great preparations necessary for such an alliance, and quite hurt Polly's feelings by saying "that she would need very little, and the plainer the better." Society, in Mrs. Withers's acceptation, would know her no more, and she impressed the painful fact upon her daughter so harshly that Polly was perfectly indignant.

"John is good enough for a queen, mamma, and you know that he comes of the nicest sort of people, while we are *nobodies*. Oh, we are rich, I know, and splurge, and all that, but we are nobodies, all the

same! I 've heard people say so at our own parties often enough, goodness knows, when they did n't dream I was near. John's father was very rich, too, before he failed. You speak as if I were disgracing myself, or digging my own grave, by marrying my darling John, that all Europe honors! You ought to be ashamed to talk so to me, mamma. And I 'll see whether popper is willing for me to have the trousseau of a cook, — yes, a *cook*, mamma, when you spent a fortune on Mathilde just because she was going to marry Mongolfier, and Mongolfier was a Marquis, — a Marquis that gambled and cheated his creditors and beat his wife! A million such are not worth the tip of John's little finger," Polly hotly declared.

"Still, he was a Marquis. And in your rank of life you will not need more than I have said," insisted Mrs. Withers, magnificent in a Worth tea-gown, and looking vastly more regal than most sovereigns.

"My 'rank of life'! You make me sick, mamma. My 'rank of life'! Oh, well, if you are dressing me to match my mother, who was a milliner, and my father, who was a miner, perhaps you are right, mamma! Only I know very well that *popper* won't think so, — that 's all. Neither will he approve of the way you receive and treat John. He has n't noticed it, but I have. It 's perfectly shameful and ridiculous, mamma," replied Polly, fully roused. She was a young woman who could give an answer back, and filial piety had been little inculcated in the Withers's establishment — I will not say home.

Mrs. Withers's pale, set face with its firm jaw was turned upon her daughter for a moment.

"I know American society and European, too, if anybody does. When your father dies, and you get his money, society will take you up. But if you marry a poor man and live in a small way in the suburbs of New York, as you say you intend to do, you will be dropped. See if you are not! You are a fool, Polly. There's nothing in it. But I was determined to have it. And I've got it. And I know it down to the ground. If John were a genius and you were an angel, — and you both are very far from being either, — you would still be dropped."

Polly told John all about the quarrel that night.

"Carlyle has likened women who are ambitious socially to snakes in a bottle, — all wriggling to be uppermost. And you know what Lowell said of it, Polly, 'Good society would be delightful if it deserved either the noun or the adjective.' It is n't companionship; it is n't enjoyment; it is n't business. It is the most ingenious system that was ever invented for preventing people from being themselves, or enjoying themselves, or making the most of themselves, I think. Women invented it — unless the devil did. Women keep it up. The whole thing would resolve itself into good clubs, good dinners, and pleasant places of amusement to which people went in every-day attire, at their own expense, if men ran it, — that's certain. Men hate humbuggery as much as they do formality. They achieve 'position' if they can, and do without it very comfortably if they can't; at any rate, they don't lie awake at

night thinking about it, ever. I am glad you don't care for that sort of thing, Polly. No more do I. Let us be dropped, then, by all means. Amen! Put on your hat and come out for a spin," was John's attitude in the matter.

The upshot of it all was that Polly and John were very quietly married at St. Jude's, one lovely spring morning, after early service, "without any flowers, fireworks, or friends," as John afterwards put it. He was greatly relieved by the manner in which he was "spliced," and jubilant when it was over. "Now, my girl, we'll get out of this pretty quick," he said, as he strode off to see if his carriage was at hand, beaming with happiness, and oozing content from every pore. Mrs. Withers looked on — who shall say with what thoughts? Was Polly a fool? Was she not rather the wisest of virgins? And what youth, health, happiness!

The ruling passion was still strong in her, though. "Polly," she said, after the last kiss, "when you get settled, give a civilized dinner and wear a Worth gown. And don't be too affable."

"Polly, my girl, be a good wife. Be a good wife, my dear. Always try to make your husband happy. Don't go in debt; and be sure you pay your bills every week and take receipts and file them. Let society go hang! There's your husband waiting for you," was her father's counsel.

"I think you are a lucky girl, — a very lucky girl, Polly. There is nothing like a good American husband. You'll never be where I am," sighed Mathilde.

"I should think not!" exclaimed Polly. "Poor Mathilde! When you get tired of turtle-soup and trumpets, come over and see us, dear, and we will try our best to make you happier. Only don't bring that *bonne*, please. And we will dress and undress Florence ourselves, and get dinner, perhaps, and have lots of fun. There's John coming for me. Good-by, dear, good-by!" was Polly's reply.

Mongolfier, meanwhile, was anything but a happy man when he found out how his wife had tricked him, of her return to her father, and the style in which she was living. He worked himself up into a passion whenever he thought of it, and when he spoke of it, alternately raged and wept like a child. He bored his friends so much with his wrongs, in fact, that they avoided first the subject and then him, as only the man with a grievance is shunned. Not very warm or very reputable friends, it must be confessed. Occasionally he found an oasis of sympathy in some Frenchwoman who detested Americans, but in the main the general verdict was that he had only got his deserts. The Church was scandalized, and prophesied terrible things for him. His people turned their backs on him, being of the opinion that he had managed very badly and thrown away a fortune. From society and the clubs he had long been banished.

Déclassé, poor, vicious, he was, indeed, a fearful example of a loveless, godless man, and, finding himself in ever greater and greater straits, he decided that the only thing to do was to be reconciled to his wife, and so regain his hold over her father.

Accordingly he promptly inaugurated a one-sided correspondence with her in a series of letters, which as literary curiosities deserved to be preserved. Models of hypocrisy, of untruth, of selfishness, of insincerity, of cleverness, they certainly were. But they were not clever enough to dupe the wife to whom they were addressed, by a long shot. He represented himself as desolate, repentant, devoted. He asked forgiveness for the "passion of a moment," as he delicately called the beating. He declared that he pined for the sight of his "*chère petite ange*," and his "*bonne et belle Mathilde*." He recalled with tears, he said, their honeymoon, and reviewed all his past conduct in a spirit of perfect frankness and utter disapproval. He abased himself, he said, before "the excellent parents of his dear wife." He called Mathilde his angel, his love, his life, his guiding star. He painted his loneliness and deep poverty in the most heart-rending way. Again he quoted Hannah More, and fell back upon Maria Edgeworth.

But through and beneath it all Mathilde, reading between the lines, beheld the libertine, the egoist, the gambler, the *mauvais sujet*. Nevertheless, she was so far moved as to show her letters to her mother, who advised her to go back to him by all means, — "a woman in your position is neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring. Take him back, and *stamp* on him. Manage your money yourself. Make him a good allowance on condition that he behaves himself, and you will see that he will make a very fair French husband," she said. Mathilde then took

her precious missives to her father, who heard them sternly in total silence, and then said to her: —

"Mathilde, if you ever have anything more to do with that man, you walk out of that door and never enter it again. Do you hear?" She had heard, and made her choice between the two on the spot, definitely and forever.

Getting no response, Mongolfier now addressed himself to Mr. Withers. He might as well have tried to bully and cajole the Rock of Gibraltar. When five or six of the Marquis's letters had arrived and been duly translated, Mr. Withers took a sheet of note paper and sat down and conveyed to the noble gentleman certain facts: that he was applying for a divorce for his daughter; and that if Mongolfier ever set foot in his house "to claim his beloved wife and child," as he had loftily talked of doing, that he would "put daylight through him," — an expression that somehow powerfully affected Mongolfier and ended the controversy. He had heard stories of California mines and miners that gave importance to the idiom, and he objected naturally to being converted into perforated cardboard.

Mrs. Withers was not at all pleased by the outcome of this match of her own especial making; and she was still more disgusted eventually when Mathilde, not finding her position at home or in the world an agreeable one, saw fit to accept a plain American, — "a *Smith*," as her mother described him (and John, at that), — in the real-estate business; a good man, devoted to her, who ever after was to her the best of husbands, and to her child

the most indulgent of fathers. "Mathilde has thrown herself away," Mrs. Withers confided to her friends; "just thrown herself away."

"You have come to your senses at last. I guess America and the Americans 'll be good enough for you for the rest of *your* life," grimly commented her father.

Very grim was Mr. Withers all that year; for it was within the year that Mathilde thus altered her condition. Grimly he came, grimly he went. If he had been one of the poorest men in the community, he could scarcely have led a more quiet, retired life. But the household was always astir with this or that gayety, and Mrs. Withers's social effulgence was greater than ever. She told people that she entertained so perpetually to divert Mathilde from her brooding thoughts. But in reality she did it to fill the awful gaps and silences and fears of her own frightened soul, which had made no preparation for a fatal disease, the rack of constant pain; for death, eternity. The face which was most constantly before her all during this time, strange to say, was the long-forgotten one of the stern Baptist minister at Philipopolis, who had told such unpleasant truths. But she knew no other God than society, and to society she turned more earnestly than ever, though it no longer engrossed or indeed in the least interested her.

It was on a very bitter winter's night that Mr. Withers approached his house, to find a long file of carriages discharging hundreds of guests before the brilliantly lit portal of his establishment. He had

been in New York for a fortnight, and was feeling ill, and had hoped for quieter conditions. He glanced up at the house ablaze from basement to roof, at the awning, the crimson carpet, along which diplomats, belles, beaux, all the Washington world, hurried, at the obsequious group of flunkeys receiving them, and then with an impatient sigh and a "I do believe Lizzie would have all this at her own *funeral*," he slipped around to a side door and admitted himself. No one observed him; nobody cared whether he was present or absent. Society had grown to consider these entertainments exclusively as Mrs. Withers's affairs. If present, the master of the house generally sat in a corner for half an hour, and then drifted to the library for another hour, and from there to bed. If absent, society always contented itself with polite inquiries.

So Mr. Withers, with a curt nod to the butler, made his way upstairs to his room. A little later, Bright admitted what he called "a person." He had to keep himself up to the mark in such matters, and he meant one of those nondescript men who might be a chiropodist, a veterinary surgeon, a policeman, almost anybody, but was certainly not a gentleman. The man asked to see Mr. Withers "on pressing business," and was sent upstairs with Hector, Mr. Withers's body-servant. Five minutes later, Bright was again called upon to admit another arrival, — a gentleman without question this time, with something so strained and eager in his face, when he asked for Mr. Withers, whom he said he wished to see "on private business of importance,"

that Bright immediately scented something in the wind. Hector was again called, and, after reporting to Mr. Withers, again led the way upstairs, and was then dismissed.

The "person" was a private detective. The gentleman was the president of the bank in which Wallace Withers was employed, and they had both come to tell Mr. Withers that his son had forged his father's name for fifty thousand dollars successfully and fled to Spain. In very few words, and as kindly as possible, they got it out somehow, looking away from Mr. Withers sometimes, with instinctive delicacy, and at him sometimes, with irrepressible curiosity, as they did so.

Mr. Withers was sitting in his armchair, near a fireless grate. His comfort was the last thing thought of in that house, with all his money. He had, indeed, just been thinking fretfully, "I told them I was coming home to-night; they might have had a fire. It costs me two hundred thousand dollars a year to keep up this establishment, and I was more comfortable and far, far happier on sixty dollars a month in a miners' camp," before either of his visitors came. But his vexation vanished the moment he saw the men before him. The shadow of the coming announcement enveloped them, and he saw it clearly.

His heart contracted in a kind of spasm, and an ominous red flush overspread his face, followed by an extreme pallor. He had been a hard, a selfish, even an unscrupulous man himself, in getting money and driving bargains, but according to his code and

the commercial standards of right and wrong, he had always been an honorable man. He had often said that the man who was dishonest in business was a fool; and there was nothing that he so heartily despised as the man who broke his word and did not fulfill his agreements. So it was with a great and fierce pang that he heard of his son's sin and flight. His son, the heir of a great property, the bearer of his name, the youth from whom and for whom he had hoped so much and planned so long, — a common thief! He took it very quietly in his stiff, rigid way, — so quietly that his visitors were quite deceived. He got out his check book, wrote a check for the amount, gave it to the bank president, and with a few words got rid of his unwelcome guests. He accompanied them mechanically to the head of the stairs, briefly thanked and dismissed them, and returned to his armchair.

Other and more brilliant guests continued to pour into the house until long after midnight. The sound of the orchestra filled all the lower hall, and melting Strauss strains found their way upstairs and into the dark room where the old man sat thinking, thinking, thinking. Dancing began, and the noise from a thousand feet penetrated to the upper floor; voices, too, from the ladies' dressing-room opposite, — fresh young voices, chattering about partners and toilettes; blithe young feet tripping downstairs to join in the next waltz. And still the old man sat alone in the dark.

Suddenly he threw up his hands, and cried out "My God!" then feebly and more feebly, "Hector!

Lizzie! Polly!" in turn. But Hector was watching the dancing, well amused, and Mrs. Withers was receiving the Danish minister with great *empressement*, and Polly, as we know, was far, far away.

When Hector, who was looking on at the dancing, finally remembered his master, he went into the room and lit the gas. He thought his master was dozing, but chancing to glance at him attentively, the valet perceived that something was amiss. He roused Mr. Withers, and seeing that he was really ill, he helped him to his bed, and went downstairs in search of Mrs. Withers. He first found Mathilde.

"What is it, Hector? Papa ill? Oh, nonsense! I can't go to him; I am leading the cotillion," she said, and started off to distribute the favors. Hector next found Mrs. Withers.

"Mr. Withers sick? Well, tell the housekeeper to give him something. I can't come. Don't you see that I am just going in to supper?" was the reply he got to his suggestion that madame should come up at once.

"But, madame, I am afraid it is serious," he began.

"Oh, stuff, Hector! You are always bothering at the wrong time. Mr. Withers is all right, I tell you. There, the dining-room doors are being thrown open," said Mrs. Withers, cutting him short with a frown, and then with a smile, taking the arm of the Chevalier Von Grade, the great African explorer, she swept past Hector in great state, still one of the handsomest women present of any age. When Hector got back to his master, he was tossing on his

bed, and moaning and muttering in a way that thoroughly alarmed his servant. A kind Saxon creature was Hector, not of his blood, a mere dependent, but he had that in his veins and heart which made him a brother to every man. He watched with Mr. Withers for some time, carefully shading the light. At last, still further alarmed by his appearance, he rose.

"It is no use going to those ladies; they will not come. It is a shame. I will call the housekeeper, and go for the doctor," he thought. As he picked up his hat to leave the room, he heard a faint voice from the dim corner where the old man was lying, saying: "A failure, my life, — perfect failure! Polly! — want Polly!"

He hurried downstairs and out of the house. The young girls were tripping upstairs now to get their wraps, along with the tired, sleepy matrons, followed by a train of men. And up with them, right in the midst of the merry, thoughtless throng, came the beautiful angel whose name is Death, whose countenance is as lightning, whose salutation is "Peace!" Mr. Withers had no further need of his doctor, his wife, or his daughter. He had left the last round of the ladder of fortune behind him forever.

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